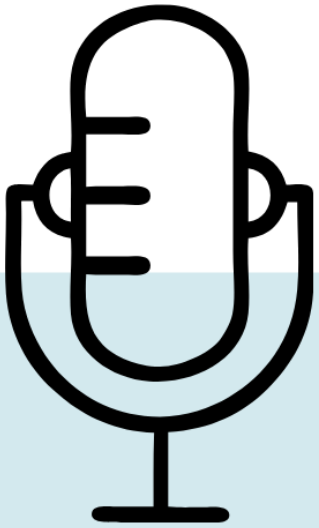
JUNE 2020

LEARNING TO LISTEN



DIVERSITY IN INSTITUTIONAL ARCHIVES: LEARNING FROM BBC AND THE BRITISH LIBRARY SOUND ARCHIVE'S THE LISTENING PROJECT

MASTERS IN ARCHIVAL STUDIES
MA HISTORY
DATE OF SUBMISSION 29/6/2020

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S1800914

Abstract

If we want our institutional archives, as knowledge banks and houses of memory, to be democratic and reflect, to a much a greater degree than they currently do, the societies which they are meant to serve, then they will need to become more diverse: more diverse in their collections, in their processes, in their personnel and in their actions. Diversity is a complicated and nebulous term. Within the framework of the wider academic discourse about why and how to diversify institutional archives, this thesis focuses on BBC's The Listening Project (TLP) in the context of the oral history movement. It analyses TLP's aims, methods and the extent to which it can provide insights into increasing diversity in institutional archives.

Word count: 27, 561
Including References: 33, 753

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INTRODUCTION

"…archives are of the people, for the people and often even by the people."[1]

If we want our institutional archives, as knowledge banks and houses of memory, to be democratic and reflect, to a much a greater degree than they currently do, the societies which they are meant to serve, then they will need to become more diverse: more diverse in their collections, in their processes, in their personnel and in their actions. Institutional archives are powerful tools. They can be used to maintain the dominant ideology and to perpetuate inequality and social injustice because their collections, and those who collect, do not represent adequately how diverse society, or most people's lived experience, actually are.

In 2012 the BBC and the British Library (BL) collaborated to create The Listening Project (TLP)[2] aiming to create an expansive collection of British voices to be disseminated on BBC Radio 4. Oral historians have long supported these types of forms of 'history from below', the aim of which is to put on record voices from those not traditionally included in archives such as underrepresented communities, alternative (hi)stories, and counter narratives. Oral historians have generated new collections and also changed perceptions of what makes a record. Fi Glover, The Listening Project's presenter on Radio 4, says, "Everyone's life is remarkable in some way. We all have a story to tell" and that it is important to record these stories.[3] This sentiment was also important among the initiators of the oral history movement in the 1970s. While there are criticisms of the oral history movement, there is much that archivists can learn from the core principles that governed the movement and continue to influence the BBC Listening Project today. Institutional archives have a responsibility to continue to adapt and change to better serve society, using TLP and its roots in the Oral History Movement lessons on increasing diversity can be learned and hopefully applied to institutional archives. Within the framework of the wider academic discourse about why and how to diversify institutional archives, this thesis focuses on

[1] Terry Cook, "What is past is prologue: a history of archival ideas since 1898, and the future paradigm shift", *Archivaria 43* (1997): 17-63, there 30.
[2] "The Listening Project", BBC Online, accessed 14/12/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01cqx3b.
[3] Fi Glover, "The BBC's Listening Project Live Specials: hear the secrets of private lives", *The Guardian,* June 8, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/media/tvandradioblog/2015/jun/08/bbc-listening-project-live-specials-fi-glover-hear-the-secrets-private-lives

BBC's The Listening Project (TLP). In the context of the oral history movement, I will analyse TLP's aims, methods and the extent to which it can provide insights into increasing diversity in institutional archives.

Archivists such as Jules (2016), Cook (1997), Caswell *et al* (2014 and 2016)[4] argue that there is still complacency in archivism, which continues to function according to systems that privilege some actors but oppress others. The decision processes in archival practice continue to reflect the ideology and worldview of dominant groups in society and archives therefore ensure that this ideology is perpetuated as the norm. The consequence of this: archives often, still, do not include records of marginalised or oppressed groups. They have called upon archivists and heritage professionals to act against this complacency. While this echoes the calls from Jewish-American and socialist historian Howard Zinn in the 1970s, the debate around diversity and inclusion has changed. Society and especially archivists, he argued, must accept that archival neutrality is fake and that it was vital to create "a whole new world of documentary material, about the lives, desires, needs, of ordinary people".[5] Renewed efforts to increase diversity and centre inclusivity are also framed by postmodernist understandings of history and archives, but additionally it questions the very principles of archiving to include co-creators not only in the collections but also in the entire process of collection creation.[6] So archives should not just be by, about and for the privileged: there is a critical need for more diverse archives.

Over the last two years while working at the International Institute for Social History (IISH) I, along with some of my colleagues, have been increasingly compelled to find avenues for the IISH, as an institutional archive, to participate in the growing academic and popular discourse

[4] Argued in Bergis Jules, "Confronting Our Failure of Care Around the Legacies of Marginalized People in the Archives", *Keynote at the National Digital Stewardship Alliance annual meeting* (2016), Cook "What is past is prologue", Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand "Critical archival studies", *Memory 2* (2002): 1-19, Where Caswell et al cite Harris (2007), Zinn (1997) and McKemmish et al (2011) to argue this point, and again in Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing: Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives", *The American Archivist* 79 (1) (2016): 56-81.
[5] Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives, and the public interest", *The Midwestern Archivist 2* (2) (1977): 14-26, there 25
[6] Itso Huvila, "Participatory archive: towards decentralised curation, radical user orientation, and broader contextualisation of records management", *Archival Science 8* (1) (2008): 15–36. Livia Iacovino, "Rethinking archival, ethical and legal frameworks for records of Indigenous Australian communities: A participant relationship model of rights and responsibilities", *Archival Science 10*(4) (2010): 353–372.

about diversity. While there is on-going introspective research at the institute and on fellow archival institutions, it is also valuable to look at the activities of other disciplines and projects to learn from others and apply these findings to the archival context.

Institutional archives, for example, national and city archives, have traditionally collected written documents, legal papers, property licences, bureaucracy and the lives of the elite or those who have been judged by the elite as historically important. The history of the IISH is different, established in 1935, the work of the institute dates back to Nicolaas W. Posthumus (1880-1960), a pioneer of modern economic history in the Netherlands who set up the Netherlands Economic History Archive (NEHA), the first of a series of scholarly institutions he founded. By the early 1930s there was an increasing need for a separate approach to house the expanding collections and the threatening political situation in Europe added urgency to the matter putting collections of labour movements among others at high risk. The first years of the new IISH were dedicated to "saving material from all over Europe" the NEHA would be physically reunited with the IISH in the 1990s.[7] The institute was created as a safe haven for materials and focused on the lives and work relations of what perhaps Zinn would have called 'ordinary' people. Nonetheless, there are still choices being made by the few about what was considered archival and valuable.

Indeed, there are many problems facing any attempts to create a totally inclusive archive as some stories will always be left untold. What is particularly problematic though, is current archival practice silences and creates absences and distortions, which mostly affect the legacies of marginalised peoples. What that means is, the further away an individual or a community is from the current norms, the less likely there is to be a record of a life like theirs. This is a point that Australian archivist and historian McKemmish has highlighted through her work in Australian history that has led her to conclude that there is "a growing recognition that western archival science and practice reflect and reinforce a privileging of settler/invader/colonist voices and narratives over Indigenous ones, of written over oral records".[8] McKemmish has sought to recover the voices of Australian Aboriginals to challenge the received narrative of what

[7] "A Detailed History of the IISH", International Institute of Social History, accessed 06/06/2020, https://iisg.amsterdam/en/about/history/detailed-history-iish

[8] Sue McKemmish, Shannon Faulkhead & Lynette Russell, "Distrust in the archive: reconciling records", *Archival Science* 11(3-4) (2011): 211–239, there 218

Australian history actually is. This demonstrates that archivists need to change the way they think about what could be and should be included in any archive. This recognition extends further than the Indigenous or Aboriginal voices that McKemmish has described in her appeal to her Australian contemporaries. Jules argues that within archival academia and associations there has been a "failure of care around the legacies of marginalized people in the archives" in every regard.[9] In other words, there is a strong argument that on the whole archives, especially institutional archives, are not diverse. This is a problem that needs to be addressed to provide a history that is representative and recognises that it has not been so in the past.

While the current debate around diversity, inclusivity and the role of the archive echoes that of the 60s and 70s, it has moved to accommodate for and reflect the changing dynamic of the social disquiet and fight for greater representation in all areas of society. Indeed the issue of diversity is an area of growing debate in politics, culture, education and the sciences more generally. This is no less true in archivism. There is a growing view spearheaded by archivists such as Smith (2019), St-Onge (2019) and Caldera and Neal (2014) [10] that archival institutions and archivists must "ensure that archives are as diverse as the world we live in and to preserve the individuals and cultures that have been consciously or unconsciously underserved in the archives".[11] Caldera and Neal have edited a reader on diversity in archives, yet the archival literature discussing diversity and inclusion continues to be limited. Indeed, it is a "woefully underrepresented subject".[12]

Furthermore, the concept of diversity is contentious. There are arguments about what diversity means, what it is for, who it is for and why it matters. And it is true that diversity can seem so "nebulous"[13] that it is difficult for people to know how to apply it effectively. In this thesis I will argue that Library Associates and NC State University Klerk and Serrao are right in their

[9] Jules, "Confronting Our Failure of Care"
[10] Helen Wong Smith, 'Introduction', *Journal of Western Archives 10*(1) (2019): 1-5, *https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol10/iss1/1,* Karine St-Onge, "Digital Ethics and Reconciliation in Libraries and Archives", *University of Victoria Library Publications* (2019*):* 1-86. and
Mary A. Caldera and Kathryn M. Neal. (Eds.), *Through the archival looking glass: A reader on diversity and inclusion*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2014)
[11] Caldera et al, *Through the archival looking glass*, XXI
[12] Smith, Introduction (2019)
[13] Helen Wong Smith, "Diversity and Inclusion in Archiving" *Moving Image Archive News* (2018), accessed 24/06/2020], http://www.movingimagearchivenews.org/diversity-and-inclusion-in-archiving/

argument that it is more useful to think of diversity in terms of ethics and actions rather than focusing on the results.[14] One consequence of focusing on results is that it leads to compartmentalisation, which is in itself a form of exclusion. A focus on seeking to have more LGBTQ+ collections has the unintended consequence of labelling people and not appreciating the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community. A focus on results can lead to remedial action that does nothing to instil change because it ignores the underlying causes of exclusion and the reasons for systemic lack of diversity. So, archivists should be thinking about *what it is that they are doing* when putting together archives and the *processes of their decision-making*, so that their actions challenge norms, the status quo and the idea that records are neutral.

It could be argued that the current debate around diversity has its roots in the 1960s 'history from below'-movement, often led by Marxist and socialist historians and thinkers. Among the most important of these attempts was the oral history movement. The oral history movement was positioned 'against the grain' of traditional archival collections. It challenged the idea of record as only written and the idea of neutral and singular truth. The potential of oral history to include more voices in the archive enabled archivists who wanted archives to be more diverse, and so to better represent the lived experience of many more people, to challenge the status quo. Articles, books and academics often implicitly relate oral history, in both its method and its collections, to diversity. But, as historian Jessica Wagner Webster lays out in her research on oral history, archivists using the technique tended to focus on filling gaps rather than explicitly dealing with the concept of diversity and its underlying factors.[15] Furthermore, as Kidd acknowledges in her PhD-study on oral history and storytelling, it has not been easy to measure the outcomes of oral history projects in terms of the extent to which such projects actually led to diversifying archives because of this focus on plugging gaps and creating an oral record.[16]

Pioneers of oral history in the late 1960s and 1970s included social historians Filippelli, E.P. Thompson and, a key figure in the early development of the UK Oral History Society (OHS),

[14] Taylor de Klerk and Jessica Serrao, "Ethics in Archives: Diversity, Inclusion, and the Archival Record" *NCSU News* (2018), accessed 20/06/2019, https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/news/special-collections/ethics-in-archives%3A-diversity-inclusion-and-the-archival-record
[15] Jessica Wagner Webster, "Filling the Gaps": Oral Histories and Underdocumented Populations in" *The American Archivist 79* (2) (2016): 254-282.
[16] Jenny Kidd, "Capture Wales: Digital storytelling and the BBC*:* Doctoral dissertation", *Cardiff University* (2005)

Paul Thompson. They were committed to a history that pulled from the experiences of a range of marginalised and oppressed social groups.[17] In the growing interest for social history, oral historians endeavoured to find out more about the lives of women, workers, immigrants and indigenous peoples among others. Oral historians Graham Smith and Alistair Thompson describe the OHS as having played a key role in the integration of oral history to institutional archival record in the UK.[18] The OHS was founded in 1973 by academics from a range of disciplines and included representatives from the BBC and British Institute of Recorded Sound.[19] The OHS epitomised the growth of 'bottom up' history in an attempt to combat the gaps in archives, libraries and heritage institutions. The OHS and it's journal focused on "under-represented" communities or those "missing from traditional historiography", particularly working-class narratives.[20]

While oral history contributed to change and challenging archives, the ever-evolving practice of history-making leads to further critique of the process of its creation. That is not to say oral history was unsuccessful in diversifying to an extent, but that the goal posts moved, and so re-evaluation of the techniques employed and indeed re-questioning what diversity actually means, and to who, is necessary and a continuous process. Including more and different narratives from different 'voices' is still highly relevant to archivists seeking to diversify archives today. Caswell et al argue that diversifying collections is particularly meaningful for those whom the archive is about, indeed introducing new and counternarratives to existing histories can have an enduring impact for those who are ignored and oppressed in/by record.[21] By creating archives to include people whose voices were, in the past, never heard the hope is that they can begin to be represented.[22] As noted above, the contemporary discourse surrounding diversity in archives is complicated, but diversity that focuses on action rather than outcomes is necessary if archives are to change, and challenge what Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci described as ideological

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[17] Rob Perks & Alistair Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 3

[18] Graham Smith, "The making of oral history: Sections 1–2" *Institute of Historical Research*, (2008), accessed 24/06/2020, https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/oral_history.html
[19] Alistair Thomson, "Oral History and Community History in Britain: Personal and Critical Reflections on Twenty-Five Years of Continuity and Change", *Oral History 36*(1) (2008): 95-104, there 95.
[20] Smith, "The making of oral history" (2008)
[21] Caswell et al, "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing" 56-81.
[22] Ibidem.

bourgeois cultural hegemony.[23] This means that diversity should go hand in hand with participatory practices, (which the oral history movement pursued) for instance, working with communities, allowing user-generated content through keywords or descriptions, or reframing collections with more narratives. In Helen Wong Smith's special issue on diversity, inclusion and cultural competency in the *Journal of Western Archives,*[24] Terry Baxter argues that archives need to go further and relinquish power and control to "reveal" diversity, so that historically disenfranchised communities can tell their own stories.[25] Not to be represented, but to be able to represent themselves.

These ideas of 'participation' in history and 'telling our own stories' in current diversity discourse, are today still a very important element in oral history. Sheila Rowbotham, an historian of feminism and radical social movements, argues that with these ideas the oral history movement has always been radical in its approach to history. She points to the fact that Paul Thompson, and other pioneers of oral history in Britain, wanted to add to the archives the previously unrecorded lived experiences of people "who might otherwise have been 'hidden from history'"[26] and to bring "recognition to substantial groups of people who have been ignored".[27] In pursuit of diversity in institutional archives, there is much that can be learned from the ethics, processes and methodologies of oral history.

Within the framework of the wider academic discourse about why and how to diversify institutional archives, this thesis focuses on BBC's The Listening Project (TLP). In the context of the oral history movement, I will analyse TLP's aims, methods and the extent to which it can provide insights into increasing diversity in institutional archives. TLP was set up in 2012 by the BBC and The British Library (BL). In TLP a conversation[28] is recorded between two people that know each other, talking about anything they want. The idea is that this will become a hugely

[23] Gramsci (1971) As described by Andrew Heywood, *Political Theory: An Introduction*, (London: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2015): 81;84
[24] Smith, *Introduction* (2019):1-5.
[25] Terry Baxter, quoted in Smith, "Introduction" 5
[26] Sheila Rowbotham quoted in Perks & Thomson, *The oral history reader,* 6
[27] Paul Thompson & Joanna Bornat, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* 4th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7
[28] In this thesis I will refer to the recordings made in TLP as conversations in my analysis and discussion to clearly separate them from the interviews I will be using, both those I conducted myself and those I have used from other sources.

diverse collection of people, stories, accents and experiences in Britain. Tony Philips, a BBC administrator, commissioned this project. He enlisted the help of the head of communications at the British Library, Jill Webber, to ensure this radio project would be an archival collection accessible to all. BBC radio stations puts out calls for members of the public to come to a radio station in twos, sit at a microphone together and be recorded talking about something in their lives that they think matters. The conversations, unmediated by a radio presenter and without time constraints, are archived in full at the British Library, with three-minute edited versions of some of the conversations broadcast weekly on BBC Radio 4. Since it launched in 2012, TLP collection has amassed an impressive number of stories, celebrating its 1000th recording at the end of 2018. TLP concentrates on the recorded conversation, the people having that conversation and the effect that listening to that conversation may have on listeners. Its creators think "by taking part you'll also have the chance to be part of history"[29] which reflects the ideals of the oral history movement in that it seems to be claiming that it is inclusive and diverse because anyone can be included in history and the archives whatever their background.

Archivist and historian Rob Perks oversees the archiving of the conversations from TLP in collaboration with BBC Radio 4. Perks is currently secretary of the OHS and also the Lead Curator of the Oral History Collections and the Director of National Life Stories at the British Library. Perks has previous experience of collaboration between the British Library and BBC Radio through his work on the Millennium Memory Bank (1999). As the first attempt the British Library made to work with a public broadcast partner, this project aimed to create a collection of people reflecting on their lives at the turn of the millennium. The Memory Bank sought to focus on people's local, everyday experiences, and interviewees were encouraged to reflect on events and change at a community level rather than on the wider world stage.[30] Working with the BBC supposedly enabled the collection to have a cross section of people from right across the country by interviewing people at local radio stations.[31] The collection aimed to be diverse *in outcome* by having people of "lots of different ages, lots of different backgrounds, lots of different ethnicities

[29] "The Listening Project: About", BBC Online, accessed 20/06/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[30] "The Millennium Memory Bank" Audio Collection, *British Library Sounds* (1999), https://sounds.bl.uk/Accents-and-dialects/Millenium-memory-bank
[31] University of Huddersfield YouTube "Dr Rob Perks on the BBC Radio 4's Listening Project and oral history" (2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-r4HnH6McE

and interests all talking about their experiences".[32] According to Perks TLP is similar to The Memory Bank to try to, as he puts it, catch it "up-to-date a bit".[33] As will be discussed later, TLP is also an attempt to gather a diverse 'cross section' of people in the UK but using a different model from that used in the Memory Bank project. This model borrows heavily from the US StoryCorps created by renowned radio producer David Isay, who pioneered these methods that the TLP also employs. I have chosen TLP as my case study because it raises important questions about the nature of oral history and about diversity in institutional archives. Perks himself has reservations about describing TLP as 'oral history': "It's not an interview in the oral history sense of the word."[34]

As has already been indicated, the historical context of my analysis and evaluation is the oral history movement. I will first explore how TLP compares with conventional oral history. In the literature review I will then analyse the interviews I have collected as part of an evaluation of the extent to which TLP is achieving its aim of being diverse in a way that institutional archives have not been. I used a mixed method approach to collect my primary sources. I conducted four semi-structured interviews with participants who have different relationships to TLP. I also reflect on my own experience of participating in the project and having a conversation between myself and a close childhood friend recorded. To support my first-hand research, I then collected nine interviews and recordings of workshops and presentations conducted by the BBC and the British Library about TLP. These were retrieved from varied locations in the sounds archives from both institutions as they have, as of yet, not been collated in any unified collection nor are they easily findable on the BBC website. These are listed in full in the references. In addition to these interviews I have used media responses to the project and a BBC complaints forum as part of my primary sources. Using this second and primary source analysis, I will discuss what, if anything, can be learned from the ethics, processes and methodology of TLP that could be used by archivists to ensure that they pursue diversity in their actions.

My main research questions are:

[32] University of Huddersfield YouTube "Dr Rob Perks on the BBC Radio 4's Listening Project and oral history" (2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-r4HnH6McE
[33] ibid
[34] ibid

- Who are the makers of TLP, what are they aiming for, for whom and why?
- What are the methods of TLP?
- In what way does TLP differ from conventional Oral History projects?
- What, if anything, can institutional archives learn from TLP when it comes to diversity?

As a part of a cross disciplinary approach I will draw on the critiques of diversity by the anthropologist Ghassan Hage,[35] writer and museum curator Sumaya Kassim[36] and Heather Rosenfeld and Elsa Noterman of Roestone Collective, researchers in feminist theory and urban geography.[37] I will also be drawing from Diversity Studies to support the archival literature. Diversity Studies is a relatively new branch of social studies that examines the theoretical complexities of diversity as a concept and examines human relations by looking at inequalities wherever these exist. I will then evaluate the aims and methods of TLP using the following three aspects of anthropologist Steven Vertovec's *Handbook on Diversity Studies* (2015):

- *Recognition*, aimed at addressing historical and enduring cultural harm
- *Representation*, aiming to create institutions that reflect the public they serve, often through quotas or initiatives
- *Providing*, ensuring that spaces, e.g. businesses have the adequate measures in place to meet the needs of their myriad of users[38]

OUTLINE

In Chapter 1 I will provide a background and overview of TLP. I will examine its influence, in both practice and output, from more conventional oral collections founded in the 1970s movement, where TLP holds the same ethics, but pulls away from some of the core definitions of oral history. I will also include a discussion of the limitations of oral history and the way these may have affected TLP.

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[35] Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Routledge ; Annandale, NSW : Pluto Press, New York, NY, 2000)
[36] Sumaya Kassim, "The Museum will not be decolonized" *Media Diversified* (2017), accessed 20/06/2020, https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/
[37] Heather Rosenfeld and Elsa Noterman, Roestone Collective, "Safe space: Towards a reconceptualization" *Antipode 46*(5), (2014): 1346-1365.
[38]Steven Vertovec, "Introduction" in *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies*, ed. S. Vertovec (New York: Routledge, 2015): 1-20 there 3.

In Chapter 2, I present my analysis on a selection interviews conducted by TLP organisers and interviews that I conducted myself for this research. TLP has been running for seven years and since the beginning of the project in 2012 the organisers have been reflecting on their progress. I include interviews from a workshop at the British Library in 2015, which reflected on the first three years of the project, as well as BBC radio interviews and TED Talks from TLP launch tours.

For my original research, I interviewed Victoria McArthur, a BBC Radio Producer, Erik and James, participants in TLP, and Holly Gilbert, archivist at the British Library Sound Archive. I also draw from my own experience as participant in the project. As part of my research I had a conversation with Erik, a close friend, recorded by BBC Scotland in 2019. My background in anthropology encouraged me to get involved in the project itself to be able to reflect and observe on it personally. I have arranged my analysis of these interviews thematically according four key features I established: Listening, Intimacy, Diversity and the Absent Interviewer.

In Chapter 3, I will evaluate the strengths and limitations of TLP with regards to diversity. This evaluation will discuss the extent to which TLP 'recognises', 'represents' and 'provides' - three aspects drawn from Diversity Studies. This will enable me to look critically at the concept of diversity and the degree to which it is still useful as vehicle for challenging hegemonic structures and systems currently in place in institutional archives.

In my conclusion I will argue that my research shows that diversity still needs to be applied to archivists' *actions* and their decision-making in all archival processes. Furthermore, I argue that in spite of limitations and weaknesses in their methods and records, what makes oral history and TLP invaluable learning tools for institutional archives looking to increase diversity is not their orality: it is the decisions which they take about who they aim to recognise and represent, and how they provide space for them to do so themselves.

CHAPTER 1: ORAL HISTORY PAST AND PRESENT

Oral history was the first medium for passing knowledge to the next generation around the world, until the introduction of writing, humans relied on oral accounts of their ancestors or told through rituals and performance, and indeed, in some countries in cultures these oral traditions are still respected and realised. As Dr Divine Neba Che discusses in his chapter on oral performance in Cameroon,[1] there is a still a continuing presence of oral traditions that are lived and experienced. A 'Western' emerging dependence on written record is most clearly exemplified in the Western courts, where oral testimony was no longer enough without documentary proof.[2] In the decades following the adoption of writing, dependence on orality was deemed unreliable, by comparison, written testimony could be passed through space, time and people and be recounted verbatim. The faith placed in writing to convey the absolute truth is in itself problematic, an argument which oral historians later used as a defense for their own medium. While written work was privileged in many respects, it did not quell the consumption of oral tradition, that of the town crier, the theatre, the witness stand, public storytelling and tales around the dinner table.

Oral testimony's trajectory away from its written counterpart took it away from what was considered archival record[3]. Oral historians made efforts to reclaim the value in orality and to include all voices in the archives, a move that challenged not only what an archival record could be, but *who* could be in the archive. The introduction of technology fed into oral storytelling and gave users a platform for widespread access to news and sharing of testimony. Even after the invention and proliferation of e-books, televised content and online videos - the like of YouTube - demanded the attention of millions of viewers, radio and podcast listenership continued to have huge audiences, audiences that are still growing, with BBC Sounds being one of the most popular access points[4] for audio content in the UK.

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[1] Divine Neba Che, "Tradition and Creation: Performance among the Graffi" In Chin Ce and Charles Smith, *Oral Tradition in African Literature,* (Nigeria: Handel Books: 2015): 134-149 there 134
[2] Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066 - 1307* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2012): 44
[3] Perks & Thomson, *The oral history reader*, 3-5
[4] "Audio on demand: the rise of podcasts" Ofcom (2019), accessed 26/01/2020, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/rise-of-podcasts

Radio or podcast programs by in large do not conform to traditional oral history. Rather than following the conventional oral history guidelines, commercial recordings are made with a target audience in mind, they are edited, they have an additional soundscape, the interviewer can be omitted.[5] And yet, I will be using BBC Radio 4's The Listening Project as the central object of my analysis of oral history and archival practice. But perhaps it is precisely because it is removed from conventional oral history and what was traditionally thought of as archival record that makes it an interesting project to listen to and learn from when going forward and arguing what *could* be a record and what the archive containing it could look like.

In the following chapter I will discuss the broader context of The Listening Project, its influences, its aims and its methods. In order to understand the value of TLP for diversity in archives it is important to understand its context, which includes the oral history movement. I will discuss the oral history movement's theory and practice, and the critiques of oral history projects in archival collections. Although TLP has moved away from conventional methods of oral history, it nevertheless does record voices and work with an archive to preserve them so it may have the same limitations as conventional oral history after all. I will focus on the critiques that apply to TLP: the roles of the interviewer and researcher, biases inherent in interviews and who decides whom is included.

There are limited sources that critique or even discuss The Listening Project, the few articles that announced the start of the project, or the thousandth recording, give little information as to the reception of the project, its success in terms of visits to the archive or listenership, or indeed the value to the participants. The majority of the information available is generated by the BBC or by the British Library. These sources are critically analysed, but I also depend on TLP's broader context and place in oral history.

[5] Siobhán McHugh, "The Affective Power of Sound: Oral History on the Radio" In Rob Perks & Alistair Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 490-507.

1.1 The Listening Project

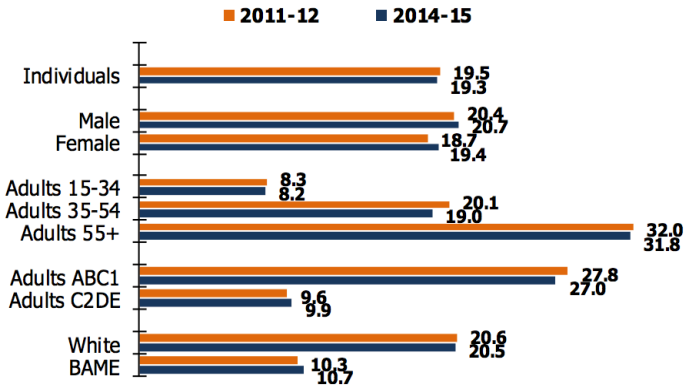
The Listening Project (TLP) launched in 2012 as a collaboration between BBC Radio 4 and the British Library Sound Archive. The initiative set out to record conversations between people who already knew each other; a technique which set it apart from conventional oral history. From here the project developed into the structure it still uses today: producers reach out to potential participants, or the public can contact their local BBC Radio station, and they come in to the studio to be recorded. The tagline of the project is, "it's surprising what you hear when you listen."[6] The project is centred around a conversation, a conversation that we, the listeners, 'overhear'. The recorded conversations are on average forty minutes to an hour long. A BBC producer then listens to the recording and, based on their judgement, selects the extracts that could end up being broadcast on Radio 4. By the time a conversation is broadcast, it has been edited to a three-minute segment. What is left is a snippet of the whole conversation intended to catch the listeners' attention. The hope is that participants will come in and talk about something personal. The participants decide the topic of the conversation. There is no interviewer and no specific theme to be covered: "This project is about creating space for you and a loved one to have the conversation you always meant to have"[7] and for people to learn about each other through listening.

Listening is a core facet of the project, so it is important to know *who* is listening to the program. Radio 4 caters for a predominantly white, middle-aged, middle class and English listenership. Seán Street, broadcaster and professor of radio, describes TLP as part of recent efforts for Radio 4 to reach out to an audience beyond their typical listenership, to introduce a "widened style of programming" and to increase "the archival aspects of the network".[8] Nevertheless the likelihood remains that the majority of the listenership for TLP is the same as the rest of Radio 4.

[6] "The Listening Project: About." BBC Online accessed 26/01/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[7] "The Listening Project: About." BBC Online accessed 26/01/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[8] Seán Street, *Historical dictionary of British radio* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015): 51

The segment on the radio is a main access point to the project. It is one of the key ways that people might find out about TLP and be prompted to take part in it themselves. So the listenership can ultimately affect who participates in the conversations. The 'archival aspect' described by Street for TLP is the BBC's partnership with the British Library, which could provide another entry point for people who have not learned about it via Radio 4.

Figure 1: Weekly reach of Radio 4 by demographic group



Source: RAJAR

Radio 4's reach remains highest in England and it has grown strongly in the South East, where it was already highest

BBC Trust Review Service 2015[9]

TLP's focus on listening and removing the conventional interviewer was inspired by the American StoryCorps project.[10] BBC Radio commissioner Tony Philips initially approached the British Library with the idea to build a collection like that of StoryCorps in the UK. He was inspired by the success of StoryCorps which is a collaborative project between National Public Radio and The Library of Congress. StoryCorp's mission is to "preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world".[11] Its founding principle is that everyone's story matters. By listening to one another's

[9] "BBC Speech Radio Service Review: Radio 4, Radio 4 Extra, Radio 5 live and Radio 5 live Sports Extra", BBC Trust Service Review, (2015) accessed 29/04/2019, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/speech_radio/speech_radio.pdf
[10] "Homepage", StoryCorps accessed 25/01/2020, https://storycorps.org/
[11] "About", Storycorps accessed 25/01/2020, https://storycorps.org/about/

stories, we can better understand each other's perspectives, build connections and appreciate shared experience while creating an "invaluable archive for future generations".[12] Founded in 2003 by David Isay, StoryCorps has amassed more than two hundred thousand interviews making it the largest single collection of human voices ever gathered.[13] Its producers have recorded Americans of many backgrounds and beliefs in towns and cities in all fifty states and in Puerto Rico. StoryCorps lists its core principles as: a commitment to "treat participants with the utmost respect, care, and dignity"; a "relentless focus on serving a wide diversity of participants"; and providing "a public service".[14]

Dave Isay is a radio documentary producer who had already gained a name for himself in radio programming before StoryCorps. He got the idea of recording conversations without an interviewer from one of his earlier projects. In March, 1993, two boys from Chicago, from the self-described 'ghetto' - LeAlan Jones, thirteen, and Lloyd Newman, fourteen - were invited by Isay to co-create the radio documentary *Ghetto Life 101*; their audio diaries of life on Chicago's South Side.[15] The radio programme managed to convey intimacy by giving the boys the space to record their own conversations about their lives, with people close to them. This intimacy was generated by giving them the privacy to talk to each other and people they know without an official third-party present, and the presence of the microphone gave them the confidence and the "licence to ask questions that they had never asked before".[16] Isay thinks that the popularity of the documentary was based on a desire to listen to something "authentic and pure", and that it is, in some regards, "anti-reality tv".[17] There was no desire among the participants to get rich and famous. In his Ted Talk it comes across that Isay has a romantic outlook of the world in the sense that he tends to view people optimistically and says they and their conversations are *always* full of "love" and "forgiveness".[18]

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[12] "About", Storycorps accessed 25/01/2020, https://storycorps.org/about/
[13] Ibidem
[14] Ibidem
[15] "Ghetto Life 101", Storycorps, accessed 25/01/2020, https://storycorps.org/stories/ghetto-life-101/
[16] David Isay, "Everyone Around You Has a Story the World Needs to Hear", Ted Talks (2015), accessed 25/01/2020, https://www.ted.com/talks/dave_isay_everyone_around_you_has_a_story_the_world_needs_to_hear?language=en
[17] David Isay, "Everyone Around You Has a Story" accessed 25/01/2020, https://www.ted.com/talks/dave_isay_everyone_around_you_has_a_story_the_world_needs_to_hear?language=en
[18] Ibidem

The TLP and StoryCorps were initiated almost a decade apart on different continents, the context for their foundations are not the same. TLP is a BBC programme, funded by the BBC primarily through a government stipulated licence fee that any British household with a TV is obligated to have.[19] The StoryCorps project is a private organisation independently funded relying on support from external institutions or individuals.[20] The projects lie on either side of the financial crisis of 2008-9, on the USA/UK invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequent wars, and multiple changes in their respective government and parliament. Perhaps more pertinent to the projects, there was a new tech and social platform boom which separated the two: the formation of Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, Bitcoin in 2009, Instagram in 2010, Snapchat in 2011, all providing new ways for us to communicate with each other, to have conversations with someone across the world, or indeed thousands of people at the same time. Nevertheless StoryCorps and TLP have no lack of participants still wanting to come in and talk, in person, and have a conversation one-on-one. These projects are products of societies with increasing demands to live public existences and share everything with everyone, to have perfect lives, to join mobs aggrieved online, to 'troll' anonymously. Storycorps and TLP provide a cocoon of 'escape', one of real human conversation and connection. Although Tony Philips does not state what prompted him to begin TLP at that moment, it is clear StoryCorps was a defining influence for him. He says, what impressed upon him the most was how StoryCorps was started by Isay in Central Station, and that people can be in one of the busiest places in the world and still escape into the recording booth to give "100% to the person who matters".[21] There will always be this desire to reflect on everything that is happening around the world, but it is just as important to talk about personal experiences, some of which will be timeless impressions of human emotion and relationships.

Although his background is in radio production, Isay was supported in his work by archivists and historians, including, as Tony Philips describes him, "great American oral historian" Studs

[19] "Licence Fee and Funding" About the BBC, BBC Online, accessed 26/05/2020, https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/licencefee
[20] "How is StoryCorps Funded" StoryCorps accessed 26/01/2020, *https://support.storycorps.me/hc/en-us/articles/115010295267-How-is-StoryCorps-funded-*
[21] Tony Philips, talking in Fi Glover, Graham McKechnie, Tony Philips, "The Listening Project" *Next Radio Conference*, (2012), accessed 26/01/2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBN2a9AP7EI

Terkel.[22] Contemporary oral historian Frisch, has described Terkel as someone who unapologetically moved away from traditional forms of oral history by challenging historians' methods, conducting informal interviews and embracing the subjectivity of the researcher.[23] Terkel's major collection of interviews *Hard Times* has been described as "moving, poignant, intense, human and instructive"[24] but also "challenging the hegemony of history as a form of knowledge"[25] Terkel pushed boundaries and both he and Isay were in turn inspired by early pioneers such as BBC presenter Mitchel from who Terkel acknowledged a debt to learning "sounds need not have a narrator".[26] Terkel cut the ribbon with Isay on the first day of recording StoryCorps, starting a project that would set the tone for an unconventional format of oral history. A format that TLP would come to embrace as well.

1.2 The Oral History Context and Unconventional Methods

The oral history movement was more than just technique; it was an attempt at reinterpreting what history could be. Librarian and Archivists Stein and Preuss trace the roots of modern Oral History back to the 1936-39 Federal Writers' of the Works Project Administration (WPA) who collected more than 2000 interviews from enslaved peoples who had lived through the Civil War. With tape recorders becoming more available in the 1940s, new techniques emerged and a decade after the WPA enslaved collections came the first university based oral history program at Columbia University.[27] In the USA this early movement grew with the Civil Rights Movement. As more historians joined the oral history movement, studies also grew to encompass more voices not captured in traditional archival materials.[28] British historian Andrew Thompson argues that the Oral History Society in Britain was a grassroots' movement that drew upon, and contributed to, British radical left wing and democratic history-making.[29] Early adopters of oral history, such as Paul Thompson, a pioneer in the UK, challenged what -and who- should be

[22] Philips, "The Listening Project" accessed 26/01/2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBN2a9AP7EI
[23] Micheal Frisch "Oral History and Hard Times: A Review Essay" In Perks & Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 40-48 there 40
[24] Frisch "Oral History and Hard Times", 41
[25] Ibidem, 42
[26] Studs Terkel quoted by McHugh "The Affective Power of Sound",494
[27] Alan Stein & Gene Preuss, "Race, Poverty and Oral History" *Poverty and Race Journal 15* (5) (2006): 1-2, https://prrac.org/race-poverty-and-oral-history/
[28] Stein & Preuss, "Race, Poverty and Oral History", 1-2
[29] Thomson, "Oral History and Community History in Britain", 96

considered of historical value, and argued that access to historical information should be open and easy to understand. Paul Thompson maintained that, as they were, archives were a "bit scary and off-putting".[30] Oral history, he said, would generate records and archives that would be easier for everyone and anyone to use. He also argued that oral history could uncover "hidden histories"[31] of people and subjects not usually found in archives - for example, working-class, women's and Black history, or stories of domestic work. Oral history collections would do more than just preserve voices; they would also facilitate discussion about the social and political implications of the making of history. Thompson thought that oral history should bring about social change in the present through a more diverse and realistic understanding of the past because oral histories would challenge the mainstream versions of how history is done, whom it is about and what it is.[32]

These ideals, of bringing about social and political change, were influenced by the cultural and social movements of the era for example, community history and publishing, the women's movement, radical left historians including E.P. Thompson, and reminiscence historians such as Joanna Bornat.[33] E.P. Thompson coined the term that would become synonymous with these changes in historical academia: "history from below",[34] challenging the notion that only the elite and their achievements were worthy of being recorded as history. He argued that the lives of most people were not represented by the lives of the few recorded in archives. The implication was that there should also be greater agency and a wider participation in the production of history. In his review of the changing British archival landscape, Filippelli made the point that oral history is for "ordinary people … to reconstruct their own past".[35] This focus on the idea of 'ordinary people', ordinary voices, ordinary lives vs. the elite is apparent throughout the oral history movement from the 1970s on, in works such as Paul Thompson's classic *Voice of the Past* (1978) through to today's supporters of oral history such as Perks (2016) and TLP. TLP

[30] Thomson, "Oral History and Community History in Britain", 96
[31]Ibidem
[32]Ibidem
[33]Ibidem, 97
[34]Thompson, E. P. History from Below (London: Times Literary Supplement, 1966): 279–80, quoted in Donald MacRaild and Jeremy Black, Studying history (London :Macmillan International Higher Education, 2007): 107
[35] Ronald Filippelli, "Collecting the Records of Industrial Society in Great Britain: Progress and Promise" *The American Archivist 40*(4), (1977): 403-411 there 408

commissioner Tony Philips quotes Studs Terkel's opening speech of Isay's StoryCorps which invokes this search for 'ordinary people' in both these projects. He says "we know the name of the guy who build Grand Central Station, we know the architect, but we don't know the name of the guy who laid the floor, or built the walls, and in many ways that's what we are trying to achieve with The Listening Project, we're trying to give voice to what Studs would call 'the little guy'".[36]

In this way TLP also aims to record 'ordinary' lives of British people. There is no prerequisite for being included and having your conversation recorded for the programme. The project invites volunteers from all walks of life to talk about their own life experiences, and in so doing creates a collection of narratives. Collecting *narratives* is a key element of what Italian oral historian Portelli describes as '*what makes oral history different'* from its written counterpart[37]. Oral sources are narrative sources from "non-hegemonic classes"[38] or, as Terkel described them 'the little guy'; the non-elite. Using a narrative can tell us a lot about interviewees' emotional responses to events and the meaning they attached to them. TLP not only provides insight into historical and contemporary times but can also tell us about how people feel about their lives, about shared experience, about their responses to current or past events in the UK and beyond, and about how they have engaged with them. The record reflects the participants' personal truth(s). This is not merely down to the interviewees or subjects the historians and researchers choose. As oral historian Kathleen Blee argues, it is also because the oral history movement is rooted in progressive and feminist politics and a belief that there should be "respect for the truth of each informant's life experiences"[39]. The emphasis remains on letting anyone tell their own story.

TLP also fulfils another key structural component of Portelli's '*what makes oral history different'*: its orality/aurality. The orality of oral history can give researchers information about illiterate or unalphabetised people, or give "social groups whose written history is missing or

[36] Philips, "The Listening Project", accessed 26/01/2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBN2a9AP7EI
[37]Alessandro Portelli "What Makes Oral History Different" in Perks & Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 48-58
[38]Portelli "What Makes Oral History Different", 51
[39]Kathleen Blee, "Evidence, Empathy and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan" in Perks & Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 424-433 there 424

distorted"[40] the opportunity to be included in historical record. Oral records also contain the tone, volume and vibrancy in peoples' voices which convey meaning in a way that written records or transcripts cannot do because they "flatten the emotional content of speech".[41] Professor of African literature, Neba Che argues, writing de-authenticates oral narratives, "it concretizes it, removes it from the living stream of its existence".[42] TLP supports the core element of *oral* history in two ways: the conversations are preserved in the archives as oral records (currently without transcripts), and it is a radio programme. Radio has, for a long time, been an important medium for oral history. Oral historian and radio documentary maker, Siobhán McHugh, argues that radio has two main benefits for oral history dissemination.[43] First, radio is by nature oral/aural; and second, radio has the potential to reach a wider audience than visitors to a library/archive/museum, or readers of books; "radio travels to where people are—in their back yards, kitchens, or cars".[44] This second benefit in particular accords with the democratising ideals of the oral history movement.[45] Radio also has a low financial barrier to access. The idea of *aurality* is especially important to TLP because listening is central to the project, it is in its title, tagline: "It's surprising what you hear when you listen" and in all the publicity around the programme. For this reason I highly encourage the reader to listen to a TLP conversation before reading about them in my analysis to get an impression of what the project is trying to accomplish for example Jo and George - Washing Your Dirty Linen in Public: [46] "Listening to the recording, as opposed to reading a transcript, gives a sense not just of who is speaking but the subtle dynamics and narrative rhythms of an oral history interview".[47]

The very orality of oral history has always confronted 'Western' hegemonic principles of record keeping which were rooted in written documents. Anthropologist Taylor Genovese argues that archival methodology is "inexorably influenced by colonialism and imperialism"[48] and archives

[40]Portelli "What Makes Oral History Different", 50
[41]Ibidem, 51
[42] Neba Che "Performance Among the Graffi", 143
[43] McHugh, "The Effective Power of Sound", 490
[44] David Dunaway quoted in McHugh "The Effective Power of Sound", 490
[45] Ibidem
[46] "Jo and George - Washing Your Dirty Linen in Public" BBC Online (2017), as referred to in my analysis of TLP. accessed 25/01/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pcwrm
[47] McHugh, "The Effective Power of Sound", 491
[48] Taylor Genovese, "Decolonizing Archival Methodology: Combating hegemony and moving towards a collaborative archival environment" *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples 12*(1): 32–42 there 34

have long been used to bureaucratise history to establish the superiority of those in power.[49] Oral records not only defy hegemonic archival principles because of their orality but also because of the subjectivity of oral testimony. By introducing oral testimony to the archive, oral historians challenged what an archival record was, could be and should be. The oral history movement was heavily influenced by the growth of social history as a separate discipline during the 1970s. Social historians supported changing historical paradigms. Howard Zinn, for example, rejected the notion of objective truth for one of subjective truths.[50] Oral history in particular was at the forefront of this paradigm shift. The recording of memories and personal experiences introduced different and multiple narratives to the archive directly challenging the authority of archival history as singular truth. Graham Smith quotes Tony Green, 1970s oral historian and folklorist, to emphasise his argument that, in simple terms, "different individuals and groups experience the same event in totally different ways".[51] Oral history recorded these different narratives for future researchers. Counter histories, non-dominant accounts of events and personalised retellings were all being brought into the archive, though not without resistance from positivist historians and archivists,[52] and were changing the shape and definition of the archival record.

The oral history movement was subversive. It attempted to counter the dominant idea of what could be counted as historical knowledge and what mattered as historical truth. Oral historians argued this was necessary as the dominant ideology in history and archivism silenced, marginalised and oppressed groups. In his report from The Society of American Archivists (SAA) about their committee in the 1970s, Mason noted that changes in historical research generated by oral historians led to the validation of oral testimony as an archival record.[53]

The traditional goals and guidelines for oral history have changed very little since this report from the SAA or Portelli's assessment of the qualities of oral history published in 1970s.[54] Nonetheless, the guidelines have been updated many times since they were officially published

[49] Genovese, "Decolonizing Archival Methodology", 33
[50] Zinn, "Secrecy, archives, and the public interest.", 14-26
[51] Tony Green, quoted in Smith "The making of oral history", accessed 25/01/2020, https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/oral_history.html
[52] Perks & Thomson *The oral history reader*, 4
[53] Philip Mason, "The Society of American Archivists in the Seventies Report of the Committee for the 1970's", *The American Archivist 35*(2) (1972): 193-286, there 262
[54] Frisch, "Oral History and Hard Times", 41, and Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different", 48-58

in 1989, twenty-two years after the founding of the American Oral History Association. The Oral History Society in the UK agrees with these guidelines in principle, although less formally, in their advice section on their website:

- Oral history seeks to deliver in-depth accounts of personal experience and reflections of the past
- The interviewee is aware of the oral historian's intent for the project and the nature of oral history in general
- All participants have voluntarily given informed consent to be interviewed and know they can withdraw at any time
- Interviewers must respect that the narrator(s) have equal authority in the interviews and can respond to questions in their own style and language
- Interviewers should strive to make the interviews accessible to the community and where appropriate to include representatives of the community in public programs or presentations of the oral history material

Summarised version, for the full list visit Oralhistory.org (2009) [55]

These guidelines concentrate on the concrete actions that the interviewer, historian or researcher should take for the recording to qualify as an oral history. On the one hand, the guidelines support the values of the oral history movement - oral history is about personal experience, and it requires participatory processes that respect the person telling their own histories, in their own way. However, on the other hand, the guidelines ignore fundamental principles that underline the movement - that it can be *anyone's* history or that there can be multiple histor*ies.* In other words the guidelines focus more on processes and less on ethics. As a consequence literature on oral history has tended pay more attention to method and to the practicalities of collecting oral history, than to challenging the status quo of historiography and archival principles, which was so fundamental to the oral history movement in its early days.

Oral history records are now commonplace in institutional records, the IISH, for example, houses extensive oral history collections, and funded the collection of history in many cases. The South

[55] "Best Practices" Oral History Association, accessed 25/01/2020, https://www.oralhistory.org/best-practices/

Asia Collections in particular sought to record oral memoirs from "communist, labour, peasant, women, cultural, anti-colonial and nationalist movements"[56] from those who didn't write anything but made significant contributions to history. In general, archivists accept collections in oral form and those from the 'non-elite'. But there is still room for change. The oral history movement continues to inspire activism among historians, researchers and archivists today who argue that archives continue to reflect dominant groups and are much less diverse than they ought to be. For example, T-Kay Sangwand, a human rights archivist, views oral record as a challenge to the limits of Western archival practice in her study of Cuban Hip Hop as record.[57] This form of oral documentation shows how oral records could continue to expand "the archival paradigm… to create a more participatory archival process, and bolster archives' visibility and relevancy in society".[58] Sangwand argues that Schellenberg's definitions of the archivists' role and archival records still remain widely used in archival practice today. Schellenberg's definitions describe archivists as custodians and records as documents defined by their textuality and tangibility.[59] But Sangwand thinks that Schellenberg's definitions create a "myopic archive, one that does not respond to intangible information forms, such as oral tradition and performance".[60] She thinks that archivists should therefore continue to challenge this myopia with new forms and formats of record. Genovese also argues that Western processes of tying history to textual documentation, and ignoring oral history, performances and traditions (as well as relegating Indigenous artefacts to museums), rather than creating indigenous-owned repositories has added to the idea that these communities are disappearing,[61] rather than critically assessing how archives have systematically erased these histories. Challenging this norm of concretising a record and Western knowledge creation also takes place in the broader discursive context of epistemic struggles. It supports epistemic freedom in "the right to think, theorize, interpret the world… unencumbered by Eurocentrism".[62] In his book *Epistemic Freedom in*

[56] Eef Vermeij, "Guide to the South Asian Oral History Collections at the International Institute of Social History", *International Institute of Social History* (2008): 1-54, there 5
[57] T-Kay Sangwand, "Revolutionizing the Archival Record Through Rap: Cuban Hip Hop and Its Implications for Reorienting the Archival Paradigm" in Caldera & Neal (Eds.). *Through the archival looking glass: A reader on diversity and inclusion.* (2014): 91-110
[58] Sangwand, "Revolutionizing the Archival Record Through Rap", 93-94
[59] Ibidem, 94
[60] Ibidem
[61] Genovese, "Decolonizing Archival Methodology", 35
[62] Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (London, New York: Routledge, 2018): 3

Africa, historian and decolonial theorist Sabelo J. Ndluvo-Gatsheni unpacks the many faceted and crucial work that is being done and that which is still needed in the decolonisation of knowledge. How rebuilding our understandings of knowledge production is vital to combatting the oppressive power dynamics at play in colonial attitudes towards the current efforts to 'diversify' without actually changing the status quo. Discriminatory practices are most dangerous when they are invisible and institutionalised.[63] "The spring that waters decoloniality is the anti-colonial archive".[64] I do not pretend the TLP is a decolonised collection, however progressive some of the elements of its creation may be. The debate around decolonisation deserves its own space that I cannot do justice in this thesis, what I hope to add to are the steps archival institutions can make to begin conversations about colonial epistemologies and to recognise that change is needed, that institutions and the individuals that make them must be accountable. Inaction is complicity.

1.3 The Listening Project

TLP resonates with efforts by a new generation of oral historians, including Sangwand, creating archives that are designed and co-created without the input of traditional historians or researchers. By moving away from more conventional definitions of oral history, TLP further challenges the archive to validate different forms of historical record. The project involves the 'subjects' of the collections form the onset as co-creators. Exploring how TLP engages with the participants can provide insight into the processes and actions, that if taken by an institutional archive could, as Sangwand says, encourage participatory methods and build a more relevant archive for society today.[65]

In a few key areas TLP breaks away from the conventional oral history guidelines. Most oral history projects have a goal in mind, a research question to answer or a directed aim to uncover histories from a particular demographic, group or community.[66] But TLP allows participants to decide the subject matter of their conversation. During the recording it does not matter if the

[63] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa*, 79
[64] Ibidem, 88
[65] Sangwand, "Revolutionizing the Archival Record Through Rap", 94
[66] Alexander Freund, Oral history as process-generated data. *Historical Social Research 34* (1) (2009): 22-48, 25

conversation ends up wandering off topic, or does not even get around to the original topic that the participants suggested to the producer, and no set demographic is targeted by the project. The result of this approach is that TLP collection has conversations covering a multitude of topics, that have been separated into fifteen themes by BL,[67] and come from twenty-nine regions across the UK. The conversations are between people "coming from diverse starting points",[68] and with participants spanning generations: in 2013 the oldest speaker was 85 years old, the youngest was 8.[69] The huge number of recordings, expansive variety of subjects, themes and multi-categories within a single conversation also challenge the practicalities of archiving using traditional catalogues.

The hope is that the variety of people and topics of conversation will draw the audience in when TLP broadcasts go out on Radio 4, and keep the BBC's listenership engaged. TLP's use of radio is not a new technique: what is different is that TLP is *primarily* a radio programme. The project was initiated by BBC radio and the recordings are conducted by radio presenters. The recordings are edited, curated and selected on the basis of radio potential and what producers such as Marya Burgess think might make "good radio"[70] so there are conflicting stakeholders. Producers say that "good radio" does not determine who is involved in the wider project, but it does influence the decision about which conversations should be broadcast.[71] So that needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the project to determine whether broadcasting with an audience in mind affects the diversity of TLP positively or negatively. By using TLP as a facilitator to reflect on archival practices this question can also be applied to the way institutional archives collect.

The biggest difference between TLP and the conventional practices of oral history, as set out in the guidelines of the OHA and OHS, is that there is no interviewer. All the guidelines of oral history mention the interviewer and interviewee. All the how-tos, the case studies, the reports

[67] Links to the fifteen themes in the British Library Sounds Archive catalogue: Community, Education, Family, Friendship, Health, History, Loss, Love, Migration, Politics, Religion, Sexuality, Sport, War, Work
[68] "Press Release: The Nation is Captures in Conversation" British Library Online (2013), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bl.uk/press-releases/2013/october/the-nation-is-captured-in-conversation-as-over-350-recordings-from-the-listening-project-are-made-av
[69] "Press Release: The Nation is Captures in Conversation" British Library Online
[70] Marya Burgess "The Listening Project: Unearthing a thousand intriguing life stories", BBC Academy (2017), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/academy/entries/61d532d8-b2cc-4f77-a522-79628b5d2e9f
[71] Burgess "The Listening Project: Unearthing a thousand intriguing life stories"

and even critiques of oral history mention the interviewer. Whole lines of study are dedicated to the relationship between interviewer and interviewees, the biases of the interviewer before the study, the effect of the interview on the interviewer. A fifth of Perks and Thompson's international anthology, *The Oral History Reader,*[72] is about interviewing. By following the StoryCorps model TLP is removing a traditionally central figure of conventional oral history practices.

Removing the interviewer is based on Isay's seminal *Ghetto Life 101* (1993). He had one core tenet for that project: people are best placed to tell their own stories. *Ghetto Life 101* demonstrated the democratising potential of new technologies and how citizens could be empowered through telling their own personal stories.[73] Historians Hardy and Dean refer to Isay's work as "sound documentary" or "oral/radio diaries" rather than oral history. But they emphasise that this in no way "diminishes the authenticity" of the recordings.[74] This model, that TLP has emulated, "collapses the interviewer/interviewee dichotomy"[75] and allows for greater intimacy by introducing a shared authority over the recording. The people whose lives are being recorded are also *recording*. In *Ghetto Life 101* the participants are also taking on the role of part-interviewer by recording conversations they have with their family members or friends. However, there is no interviewer who *only asks* questions. In the literature on oral history practices and in the archival literature, there is little discussion of the strengths and limitations of the impact of removing the conventional interviewer. I hope to explore this gap in the literature further in my analysis of TLP. The idea of removing the conventional interviewer raises the question of what would happen if, in the interests of diversity, archivists take a step back in a similar way and allowed people to archive themselves.

In spite of its differences to conventional forms of oral history, TLP nonetheless records personal oral testimony with the intention for it to be archived, to be preserved in perpetuity and to be a part of society's historical record. Therefore, it is important to understand key criticisms of oral

[72] Perks & Thomson (Eds). *The oral history reader.*
[73] Charles Hardy III and Pamela Dean "Oral History in Sound and Moving Image Documentaries" In Thomas Lee Charlton, Lois E. Myers, Rebecca Sharpless (Eds.) "Thinking about Oral History: Theories and Applications" (Lanham: Rowman Altamira, 2008): 268-320, there 297-298.
[74] Hardy & Dean, "Oral History in Sound", 298
[75] Ibidem

history that may affect my evaluation of TLP and its limitations as a model from which archivists might learn how to increase diversity at their institutions.

1.4 Criticisms of Oral History and the Responses to them

The criticisms of oral history and the oral history movement that are most relevant to TLP and to archival practices and diversity are those concerning oral historians and interviewers overstepping their roles, the biases of both interviewee and interviewer, and what affects who is involved and what is included in the collection.

First, from the 1970s the oral history movement was criticised because it seemed to encourage the historian to engage with the history they collected. Oral historians were creating their sources and, therefore, unduly influencing them.[76] By being a part of the interview and recording it, the historian became collector, creator and subject. TLP producers are also creating sources and so could be affecting them. This critique comes from a positivist perspective of historical research and archival practice, which is that the historian and the archivist should be objective and removed from the historical sources lest they affect the outcome of the historical record.[77] These criticisms were answered by the oral history movement and social historians with a counter-critique, which was that *all actors* are subjective regardless of their role in the collecting or recording of sources. Historian and archivist Valerie Yow argued that, indeed, the only thing we can be objective about is our own certain subjectivity.[78] Nevertheless, Yow argues that interviewers do need to remain alert to the ways they affect their interviews, the data they generate, and the end product. She also thinks that a "reflexive alertness" towards one's own research can enhance interview techniques and the research on oral histories.[79]

Second, oral testimony continues to be criticised for the biases of both the interviewer and interviewee especially when these biases are not made clear in the context of the record.

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[76] Perks & Thomson *The oral history reader,* 3-5
[77] Ibidem, 3
[78] Valerie Yow, ""Do I like Them Too Much?": Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa." *The Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (1997): 55-79. Quoted in Perks & Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 7
[79] Yow "Do I Like Them Too Much" quoted in Perks & Thomson, eds, *The Oral History Reader,* 7

Examples of invisible biases include not making it clear why a certain subject was chosen, not making it clear what was ignored, not making it clear who was involved and why. This raises questions for TLP because, for example, TLP does not include in its record why a particular pair of participants are chosen, or the reasons behind the selection process for the project. Frisch has criticised this kind of absence of context, describing it as a populist 'no history' approach to oral history in which testimony has been presented without historical interpretation.[80] The counter argument to this criticism is that an insistence on the need for context holds oral records to a higher standard than other formats. It suggests a "supposed equanimity and objectivity of the written document"[81] which is based on traditional view of a hierarchy of sources, with written evidence given the most credence. In other words, context should be explicitly provided for all records, not just oral ones because context is not neutral or free from bias.

This does not mean that the oral and written record are the same. Indeed the differences between the oral and written record can be viewed as an asset. Portelli celebrated oral history as a different kind of record. Both he, Joanna Bornat and Paul Thompson argued that oral history allowed researchers to amass information about individuals and communities that lack written languages, and provided them with appropriate spaces in which to comment about their experiences, thereby revealing a "rich and varied source" of a wider range of human experience.[82] TLP hopes to tap into this potential for a rich and varied source to build a collection of a diverse and "unique picture" of UK lives.[83] Nevertheless there is still a question about the extent to which diversity is reliant on the decisions and biases of the makers of this 'picture'.

Third, Kathleen Blee warns about other forms of bias in oral history that affects who or what is included. She argues that oral historians tend to record the stories of people they find admirable. This means they "have paid less attention to the life stories of ordinary people whose political agendas they find unsavoury".[84] This can skew history, as the archive fills with narratives of

[80]Frisch "Oral History and Hard Times", 33
[81] Portelli "What Makes Oral History Different", 51
[82] Thompson and Bornat *The Voice of The Past, 5*
[83] "The Listening Project: About." BBC Online, 26/01/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[84]Blee, "Evidence, Empathy and Ethics", 425

those who historians, archivists, producers agree with, while others are silenced. Blee supports oral history as a tradition of bottom up history, recording people who otherwise would remain inarticulate, including voices who do not necessarily agree with one another, or with society's collective version of events.

1.5 Situating TLP in the Oral History Movement

TLP has a strong foundation in the Oral History Movement despite moving away from more conventional practices. It was inspired by the American StoryCorps Project which has defined it methods to move away from an interviewer-interviewee power dynamic with the aim to give participants greater autonomy in the recordings. This unconventional method continues to push the boundaries of what can be considered valued archival record and how collections can be designed and co-created without traditional historians or researchers at the head of the project.

It breaks conventions with the 'Western' hegemonic archival practices, focusing on "the little guy" aspect of oral history with a feminist approach to history: anyone can have a story to tell and are the experts of their own unique experiences. Records can be created of anyone's history and multi-histories. TLP is focused on its goal to create a representative collection of British voices and stories to echo the Oral History Movement's aim to amplify systematically marginalised voices.

While the principle aims as listed on the BBC's website are clearly to support participants in creating records together, records which will in add to a growing collection of voices at the British Library, there is no information on their methods, on the range of participants or the reception of the project. There is no existing critique of how removing the interviewer might create a more inclusive space for the participants, nor how creating a radio show from the records may be a conflict of interest in the project. There is no readily available information about how TLP collects, processes or records these conversations, no tools to apply elsewhere. In the following chapter I aim to analyse the primary source material to better understand who is making TLP and how they are trying to achieve their goals.

CHAPTER 2: TLP IN PRACTICE

The Listening Project collected its thousandth conversation in late 2008. Aside from its predecessor Story Corps, TLP holds one of the largest collections of recorded voices in the world. What initially attracted me to the project was TLPs aim to *capture the nation,*[1] to capture a snapshot of the UK,[2] of personal experiences that define and reflect the population that the BBC tries to represent. The BBC has not concretely defined what this snapshot should look like or how this aim could eventually be evaluated or indeed whether it should be. Looking at the available information from the interviews, the oldest participant to date was around 100 and the youngest a spritely 5 years old,[3] the conversations span generations and according to its organisers also crosses other divides, be it geography, background, levels of poverty, voice and accents, age and gender to name a few.[4] This personal information which is taken from the participants, by filling in a form before the conversation, is not made publicly accessible. Furthermore, these categories of difference are not necessarily the most helpful definition of a diverse project. Diversity is tricky to measure, and can become less attainable the more tangible an organisation attempts to make its outcome, diversity, as I have defined it, is fluid and it is necessary to continue to challenge the components of hegemonic power imbalances rather than deeming diversity 'complete'. It is my contention however that the diversity ought to be measured, not as a series of outcomes, but rather as a series of actions. Rather than evaluating the variations in participants, I have analysed the methodology, the practices and ethics of TLP processes.

The following chapter critically examines the methods used by the project to 'capture a nation'. In this chapter I will first provide an overview of my research methods, including information about the interviews and who I have interviewed, my participant observation and the rationale for using the sources that I have used. I will outline the limitations of my research before proceeding with an in-depth discussion. My aim in this chapter is to explore the practices of

[1] "The Listening Project: About." BBC Online, accessed 26/01/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[2] University of Huddersfield YouTube "Dr Rob Perks on the BBC Radio 4's Listening Project and oral history" (2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-r4HnH6McE
[3] Interview with Holly Gilbert at the British Library (London: 08/05/2019)
[4] Interview with Victoria McArthur at BBC Radio Scotland. (26/04/2019)

TLP, using primary sources, in order to shed light on the methods it employs to try to achieve diversity.

2.1 Learning to Listen

The Listening Project has been on air and archived for over seven years. In the course of this period there have been multiple moments of reflection from the different stakeholders in the project. I have brought together a range of sources to analyse different opinions and thoughts on TLP and have arranged them around what I have determined to be the main themes of the project: Listening, Intimacy, Outreach and the Absent Interviewer. Aurality being central to oral history projects, and with the nature of the project being a radio program too, a deeper understanding of how listening infiltrates the different levels of the project is vital to understanding it. The tools the organisers employ to embed the intimate act of listening and conversation in a public project is what makes it different to a historical endeavour meant for information retrieval and archival ends, I believe it also affects the diversity of the project. TLP adopt outreach and marketing to get participants to come in for a conversation, and these methods will affect the overall makeup of the project too. Finally, what makes TLP different from conventional oral history is the lack of interviewer, I aim to understand how this method plays out in the conversations and how it comes to define the project. The interviews and sources I used reveal a number of insights into these key themes.

I conducted four semi-structured interviews about The Listening Project and the participants' connection with the project, their work, reflections, experiences and hopes for the project. I used the format of semi-structured interviews as part of a well-established method of collecting qualitative data in archival science, and in information studies more generally.[5] In an effort to have input from three different angles of the project (production, participation, preservation), I interviewed Victoria McArthur, a BBC Scotland producer, who has been involved in TLP since the start and has recorded over a hundred conversations. She was also the producer for my conversation with my friend, Erik, in 2019. I interviewed Erik, my co-participant, on his reflections on the project, and James another participant who had a conversation with his brother.

[5] Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez, "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing", 65

I also interviewed Holly Gilbert, the lead archivist of TLP at the British Library, about her role and her thoughts on the project. I made notes during the interviews and transcribed the recordings for use in my analysis. I then sent my interviewees their interview notes as a chance to follow up, to approve my notes, to add anything they felt had been left out.

I would have been remiss to neglect my own "chance to be part of history"[6] and was intrigued by the project and how it created spaces for its participants to "have the conversation you always meant to have".[7] Encouraged by my background in anthropology, and the value of personal experience as part of my feminist standpoint, I participated in the project. I have known Erik, my co-participant, since we were babies, our mothers having been in the same baby-mother group, and regardless of the outcome of this research I was happy to have the opportunity to talk with him about our relationship and whatever else we may have left unturned in our lives together. My conversation with Erik lasted around an hour. Victoria McArthur has sent us a copy, but at the time of writing, it has still not been made available, either on BBC Radio 4 or in the BL Sound Archive.

My original data is supported by a range of interviews conducted by TLP organisers or promotional materials for the project, accessed through BBC Sounds and the British Library Sound Archive and YouTube, I transcribed these and analyse them alongside the interviews I conducted. This selection includes:[8]

- Interviews conducted by Fi Glover; the presenter of TLP on Radio 4
- Interviews with producers of the project including Victoria McArthur.
- Interviews with participants[9]
- Interviews with Rob Perks BL; head sound archivist
- Interview with Jacob Low; recording booth architect.

[6] "The Listening Project: About." BBC Online, accessed 26/01/2020], https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[7] "The Listening Project: About." BBC Online, accessed 26/01/2020], https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[8] A full list of people included in the interviews is attached in the Appendix.
[9] Participants are the two people who know each other invited to have a conversation for the project.

It is important to be aware that these original sources are mostly recorded by organisers of the projects or promotional materials for the project and that this could skew the information extracted from the interviews. I acknowledge this limitation to the study and aim to be critical of the sources and to compare it with my own experience and the limited third party information available. Because majority of the interviews are created by the organisers of the project, while participants are also interviewed and speak up in the British Library Project Workshop, the power structures and dynamics of organiser-led interviews may have generated different responses than if I were to interview them for example. Nonetheless the interviews I conducted with participants, and my own experience, does not seem to contradict the responses of participants interviewed by the Fi Glover and other organisers.

The bulk of the BBC interviews were sourced from *The Listening Project Live* and *The Listening Project One Thousand* - a series of six interviews celebrating the delivery of the thousandth Listening Project conversation to the British Library. I have also included interviews from the TLP Project Workshop conducted by the BBC and the BL in 2015 which discussed the ways in which the project had been received so far, it is available in the British Library Reading Rooms in London. The workshop reflected on the successes and barriers of TLP and looked to the future, with contributions from Fi Glover, Rob Perks, commissioner Tony Philips, oral historian Joanna Barnet, and a number of BBC producers and participants. Also included are TED Talks by organisers[10] of the project, and presentations by Fi Glover and other organisers in the early years of the project, as they explained the aims of TLP and what they thought made it great to listen to.[11] The BBC recordings are not easy to find through the search facilities on their Sounds website because there is no keyword to distinguish these interviews from TLP conversations, nor are these recordings available online as a compiled collection. Except for the 2015 workshop,[12] which is not accessible outside the BL reading rooms, I have included the links to the interviews

[10] Heretofore 'organisers' refer to the BBC and British Library staff: producers, collectors, curators, commissioners etc.
[11] Fi Glover, Graham McKechnie, Tony Philips, "The Listening Project" *Next Radio Conference*, (2012), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBN2a9AP7EI, Fi Glover, Cathy Fitzgerald, Tony Philips, "The Listening Project." *Tedx Sheffield,* (2012), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZOqyntgW1g, Fi Glover, "BBC Radio 4's The Listening Project at Tara Theatre." *BBC Radio 4,* (2018), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgSVfbxCYHY
[12] British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

I did not conduct myself in the references for further context to the quotes used. When discussing the *interviews*, this will solely be in reference to the interviews collected from the BBC and British Library and those I conducted. These will be the primary sources that are quoted in the analysis. For clarity I will refer to what TLP records as *conversations*, not interviews.

Given that the participants involved were all connected to a single project, the arguments I aim to make are specifically about TLP and not oral history in general. Although the interviews I conducted, the accompanying recordings and my participation yielded rich data from which to draw several conclusions, there were only *four* new interviews. I could have gone on to collect further interviews from all angles of the project and through other methodologies such as focus groups, diaries and quantitative data from the many participants over the course of the project to uncover additional viewpoints and help support my analysis. All sources are subjective, but as Yow says, this is the nature of all narrative, I acknowledge this subjectivity and will analytically evaluate the information from each source with this in mind.[13] By critically listening to these sources I aim to discern the useful elements of the project for archives and to question the blind spots of TLP organisers and how to address these for archivists.

My analysis is not intended to add to the literature on the credibility or reliability of oral history except to agree that everyone has the right to be included in history in their own words, all voices deserve the same respect and critical appraisal as any other record in the archive regardless of whether we agree with them or if it is 'truthful'. Furthermore, my research does not discuss the technology involved in the preservation in the archive, or the complications of long-term preservation of oral records in terms of software, servers or systems management. My focus is on the actions and methodology of TLP and the ways in which these could be adapted by an institutional archive looking to increase diversity. To reiterate my argument that archivists should be thinking about *what it is that they are doing* when putting together archives and the *processes of their decision-making*.

The interviews provide an in depth look into the actionable techniques employed by the project to create spaces for participants to feel comfortable to share personal stories, to have a wide

[13] Yow, "Do I Like Them Too Much" quoted in Perks, & Thomson, *The oral history reader,* 7

range of voices and to create trust between an institution and the participants. The aim of this analysis is for the range of sources to create an information-rich case study of TLP. In-depth analysis is prioritised over quantity "for detailed description that points to the emergence and delineation of key… concepts".[14] Four key themes emerged from the interviews and my own experience: Outreach, Listening, Intimacy and the Absence/presence of the interviewer/producer.

2.2 Analysis: Listening, Intimacy, Outreach and the Absent Interviewer

The four central themes – Listening, Intimacy, Diversity and the Absent Interviewer – guide the research, beginning with the audience of listeners, the participants and their interrelationship around the core message of the project: to listen. I go on to unpack the project to explore the space and atmosphere created for the participants to able to do this in, the physical and metaphysical space of the booth, and the role the organisers have in creating this space and intimacy of the project. I then critically examine how organisers build trust, what outcomes are considered valuable and the active outreach being done to achieve these. All these components feed into the final analysis of the absence of the interviewer, and inadvertent presence of the producer.

To reflect the society that is participating and listening to the project, producers conduct outreach and proactively contact communities to build relationships of trust with people and to encourage involvement in the project. *Trust and Outreach*, and how TLP interacts with diversity and its challenges, is a key element that I look to unpack in the research in this chapter.

Millions of potential listeners tune into BBC Radio 4 every week, *listening* is a fundamental tenet of the project, not only externally; it is an integral component of the conversations too. These are fundamentally conversations, not monologues, it is a shared experience of co-participation and co-creation, participants listen to each other. TLP's tagline *it's surprising what you hear when you listen,*[15] and their inspiration, Story Corps' tagline is *listening is an act of*

[14] Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez, "To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing", 66
[15] "The Listening Project: Home." BBC Online, accessed 20/06/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01cqx3b

love[16] both lend to the importance of listening to the success of the projects, listening does not have to remain relegated to oral materials, archivists can learn to listen to the needs of the archive creators and actors too. My research into TLP shows there is value in listening fully, and there is a desire to be, and relief in being listened to by the co-participant and wider audience.

The BBC also aims to *capture the nation*'s attention. TLP is a radio program first and foremost, and so its audience is central to its ongoing success. The direct audience of a collection is also sometimes a consideration for an archivist, evaluating whether materials will be of historical value to future audience-researchers, considering how to increase access to collections for the audience-users of the archives. TLP describes its central pull as giving the public the chance to listen in to an intimate conversation, the project uses key techniques that are not usually employed by oral historians to foster and promote this *intimacy*. Intimacy is embedded in the project through the construction of its recording spaces, the unobtrusive producer and by the fact that the conversation takes place between two people who already know each other. An intimacy that lies in tension with the fact that there is an audience, and that the conversation is being recording and disseminated. I analyse interviews with producers, promoters and participants to better understand these tools and how useful they could be for archivists looking to build trust with communities to be able to collect personal experiences they deem important on their own terms.

The conversations in TLP are unique and engaging because they manage to capture an intimacy that would otherwise be unavailable through a conventional interview dynamic between a participant and radio presenter, or oral historian. One of these tools that sets TLP apart from traditional oral history is the *absence of the interviewer/producer*, a concept that deserves its own, separate, in-depth consideration. Although, given the level of input from the producers in collecting, curating, selecting, recording and editing the conversations, it shows that, although there is no conventional interviewer, the presence of the producers means that they play an undeniable role in TLP. I believe producers both affect the collection and are affected by it.

[16] "Listening Is an Act of Love" StoryCorps, accessed 20/06/2020, https://storycorps.org/animation/listening-is-an-act-of-love/

2.2.1 Listening

TLP is broadcast on BBC Radio 4, and while not every conversation is included on the radio programme, each segment that is broadcasted has a huge potential audience from Radio 4's almost 11 million weekly listeners.[17] There are no published audience statistics specifically for The Listening Project. Participants in the project could therefore have millions of people listening in to their 'private' conversation with someone they know. That figure does not include any future listeners who may access the conversations through the British Library Sound Archive. The paradox of a private conversation and a potentially huge audience is a phenomenon that the project commissioner Tony Philips describes as "a public sharing of a private truth".[18] Presenter Fi Glover discusses this paradox in a press release at the start of the project:

The joy of this prospect is that it then allows all of us to eavesdrop on that conversation, and I defy anyone not to learn more about our shared human experience through doing so. The Listening Project is awesome in the scale of its ambition but humbling in the intimacy of each conversation[19]

In an interview with past participant Rachel, Fi Glover reiterates the value of people confiding in each other on air for others to be able to listen to:

People were really grateful to be able to listen to that level of honesty[20]

In the interviews the organisers and participants show varying degrees of awareness of the potential 'public' uses and reach of the project, but also reflect on the 'private' impact of the project to the participants. The two elements, or spheres - *private* conversation and *public*

[17] "BBC Speech Radio Service Review: Radio 4, Radio 4 Extra, Radio 5 live and Radio 5 live Sports Extra" BBC Trust Service Review (2015), 3, accessed 29/04/2019, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/speech_radio/speech_radio.pdf
[18] Philips, "The Listening Project." *Tedx Sheffield,* accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZOqyntgW1g
[19] "Radio 4 launches the Listening Project" BBC Media Centre (2012), accessed 29/04/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2012/listening-project.html
[20] Fi Glover interviews Jacob Low, Rob Perks and Participants Rachel and Jeff. "The Listening Project Live", Produced by Marya Burgess (2015), accessed 20/06/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z

dissemination - are acknowledged separately in the interviews by participants. As Rachel says in her answer to Fi Glover when asked about speaking openly on a radio program:

It's not done lightly, it is national, but, when you're talking, you don't think about everyone that's listening actually, that doesn't come into it.[21]

The recognition of the two spheres to which the project belongs is central to its production. On the one hand, the bigger picture of a national collection and dissemination; on the other, a one-on-one 'private' conversation. As a project the organisers have an open invitation for inclusion, as a radio show, the BBC are looking for interesting and engaging topics, for people who are natural storytellers, and to capture unique and surprising moments that make for "fantastic stories".[22] This doesn't sound particularly inclusive, but what comes through in the interviews, with both organisers and participants, is the belief that each story recorded has the potential to be 'fantastic', as Fi Glover says introducing a conversation: "it's all in the detail and you are the detail".[23] The organisers rely on people wanting to listen to these stories because they reveal the details and peculiarities of personal experience and private truths. As psychologist and writer Susie Orbach tells Fi Glover, the project gives the public the ability to access a plethora of "lives that you didn't live, and want to know about", she continues to describe the range of idioms and intimacies as "ravishing" and how unique it is that people are able to talk about their own "extraordinary in such a comfortable way".[24]

Accommodating the preferences of the audience works towards the aim of the project to increase listenership and success as a radio program, this can be problematic if selections are narrowed to prioritise this, but increasing listenership also is an actionable goal to increase diversity. By engaging a larger audience more listeners will be exposed to peoples' stories who they may not usually come across in day-to-day life, organisers hope that an audience, now and in the future, will listen and, as Fi Glover puts it, "learn about our shared human experience" from these

[21] Glover, "Listening Project Live" accessed 20/06/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z
[22] "The Listening Project: About." BBC Online, accessed 26/01/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[23] Glover, "The Listening Project" *Next Radio Conference*. (2012), accessed 26/01/2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBN2a9AP7EI
[24] Susie Orbach interview with Glover, "The Listening Project One Thousand" BBC Online, (2017), accessed 26/05/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b08lk3jr

conversations.[25] Learning from different lives, perspectives and narratives that are less represented – at least on BBC Radio. In this way listening feeds into the aim of disseminating and highlighting a more diverse range of voices. It is not enough for people to be recorded and their narratives preserved, there is equal effort into ensuring a wide range of them are *heard*.

According to the organisers these are 'real conversations', they are not doctored, and nobody has asked the participants to divulge the information that they do.[26] It is not only the radio audience who are 'grateful' for these moments of clarity, of unexpected and surprising 'realness', there are also oral historians and producers who look for, and want to listen to, natural, unrehearsed and unmediated conversation.[27] In the thousands of 'real conversations', historians will be able to generate research and analyse not only language and emerging themes, but the connections between them. Unlike more conventional forms of oral history, TLP records conversations between people who know each other. Oral historian and British Library representative, Rob Perks discusses the value for researchers to be able to explore "their partnerships, their relationships, their friendships…[these conversations] are revealing a lot of emotion, a lot of insight about how people relate to each other… for historians of the future, sociologists, people who are interested in how we tick".[28] The oral format allows the emotion from the conversations to come through, and loaded silences 'say' more than a transcript can.[29]

This component of listening, the expectation of an audience, is central to the project for its organisers. From my experience, it is also the element the organisers want participants to forget about in the moment of recording. In preparation for Erik's and my own participation in a recording session, we were told by our producer, Victoria McArthur, that it would be better to not think about the radio, or listeners in general. In fact, we were told it was important for the quality of the conversation that we did not 'act' or 'present' to an unseen audience. Both Victoria

[25] Glover quoted in British Library's "Press Release: BBC Radio 4's Listening Project, it's surprising what you hear when you listen." *British Library Online* (2012), accessed 10/02/2020, https://www.bl.uk/press-releases/2012/march/bbc-radio-4s-listening-project-its-surprising-what-you-hear-when-you-listen
[26] Glover, "Press Release: BBC Radio 4's Listening Project", accessed 10/02/2020, https://www.bl.uk/press-releases/2012/march/bbc-radio-4s-listening-project-its-surprising-what-you-hear-when-you-listen
[27] Cathy Fitzgerald, "The Listening Project" *Tedx Sheffield* (2012), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZOqyntgW1g
[28] Perks taking in Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews Jacob Low, Rob Perks and Participants Rachel and Geoff: The Listening Project Live." *BBC Radio* (2015), accessed 10/02/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z
[29] Perks talking in British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

and Fi Glover talk about how doing so can mar the 'realness' of the conversation, giving examples of charities or organisations that wanted to use TLP as a platform for their message,

Victoria went on to say in my interview with her:

> It becomes stiff or "manufactured" if the conversation is too planned or scripted.[30]

In a BBC recording hosted by Fi Glover, she introduces Geoff as a participant in TLP who understands this dynamic. Geoff, who struggled with his mental health, talks to his colleague about their experiences of depression as men and in the business world. Geoff now speaks for Minds@work; a charity that aims to improve mental health in the workplace. Yes, he has a story to tell, he wants to use the reach of the British Library and the BBC in particular, but, the story is *his* experience and, his conversation with his colleague, is *his* 'personal truth'. So he knows that it is more powerful if he talks about his own experience and the non-for-profit is secondary, rather than a charity representative talking about someone else's story. Geoff explains:

It's because you get to so many people and there are so many people out there who are listening to this… I just hope that in 10 years' time, somebody will listen to this conversation and say, wow, what land were they living in. [31]

Geoff is aware of the audience and the potential outreach, the organisers of the project are not denying, nor restricting participants use of this platform, but 'stiff' conversations will not make it to air, organic conversation has been labelled the most popular medium for social impact. For others however, myself included, there is no expectation of an impact. Even though we covered political topics, Erik and I did not do so with the expectation of soap-boxing or changing someone's opinion on the matter. Nonetheless these conversations can have an impact on listeners – if that is, the conversation is ever aired on Radio 4. In this regard the project creates a gatekeeper model of what has the opportunity to impact others in this way at all. In many cases it is only with hindsight that the effect of the conversation is realised. Some participants are

[30] Interview with Victoria McArthur at the BBC Scotland offices (Edinburgh:26/04/2019)
[31] Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews Jacob Low, Rob Perks and Participants Rachel and Geoff: The Listening Project Live." *BBC Radio* (2015), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z

surprised by the reaction to their conversations, not only from people they know, but also from the general public, Rachel and Kate, for example, reflect on the feedback they received about their conversations respectively:

I didn't realise I could have got to somebody like that[32]

I'm gobsmacked that academics in the future will be interested in it[33]

There is a disconnect here between the participants' understanding of the archival value of their conversation and their desire to be archived. Many of the organisers and participants cite the archive and preservation in perpetuity as key factors in their willingness to participate, or as a point of interest in their conversations. On the participants' side at least, however, there is often a disbelief that researchers will see any significance in their stories. The archiving of the conversation is a continuation of the intimacy shared between two people, held 'forever' for them and perhaps those close to them and their descendants. The archival promise is to them: to their story, to add to what some organisers have referred to as their "legacy".[34]

Understanding why people want to engage with and participate in TLP helps the producers and organisers encourage more people to take part, and in doing so, increase the number of participants and the potential for diversity in the collection. One of the attractions of the project is that the telling of a story can empower the speaker, as Paula simply puts:

…to be able to tell your own story is just a lovely, treat, I think.[35]

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[32] Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews Jacob Low, Rob Perks and Participants Rachel and Geoff: The Listening Project Live." *BBC Radio* (2012), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z

[33] Glover talking to Kate "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

[34] Victoria McArthur, Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*". BBC Radio* (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396; Robinson, J. and Lizmore, J. "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

[35] Glover talking to Paula "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

Participants shared a feeling of liberation in speaking on topics that are often otherwise not spoken about due to social constraints, or the inability to bring up difficult and silenced topics, or a lack of time to engage with them with that other person. Participants know that in this recording booth, in this moment, they will be listened to. At the end of the day "we all need listened to"[36] and this need is fulfilled in the first instance by the person in front of them, their co-participant. As Rob Perks and Holly Gilbert from the British Library say, what makes this project different from conventional oral history is that you have someone there, that you know well, to share this experience with. In that studio, it is not the response or support of the invisible audience that the participants are sharing this moment with, but the person in front of them, that co-creator and co-participant. It is not something that necessarily comes naturally as my producer Victoria told me:

One of the biggest things is "teaching people how to listen"[37]

This was something that Fi Glover and her co-presenters brought up numerous times when promoting the show. They argued that people are no longer habituated to "fully listening and focusing".[38] Victoria used a personal example to illustrate the learning curve for some participants. One participant was so accustomed to talking, through a life in front of cameras and in interviews, that Victoria decided to bring it up during a break the participants had taken in the recording. She encouraged him to ask questions too, to involve the other participant, and to *listen* as well as to talk. This echoes Glover's appeal to people and the wider audience: to listen, truly, not to prepare an answer, not to think about when you can next eat, when you can go home, or check your phone: "listening is so vital".[39] It is element of TLP that challenges oral history norms. While everyone is encouraged to talk for as long as they want, it is also fundamentally meant to be a shared experience. It is not a monologue. The participants are not there just to talk about themselves but to engage one another in conversation. It is this co-creation of the recording, this co-participation and focused listening that can make the project unique and

[36] Rachel, "Fi Glover interviews Jacob Low, Rob Perks and Participants Rachel and Geoff: The Listening Project Live." *BBC Radio* (2015) accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z]
[37] Interview with Victoria McArthur at the BBC Scotland offices (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[38] Glover, "The Listening Project." *Tedx Sheffield* (2012), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZOqyntgW1g
[39] Interview with Victoria McArthur at the BBC Scotland offices (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)

special for the organisers, the participants and indeed the audience. From all points of contact with the project, people describe themselves as "privileged" and "lucky" to be able to take part.[40] The participants also reflected on the level of intimacy and healing achieved in these conversations, for example Linn and Jo tell Fi Glover:

I'd never… I couldn't speak about it really, but talking about it on that day, and listening to how me mam felt as well and how it affected her, it answered a lot of questions for me and it kind of, put things to rest and we could both move on[41]

we'd [Jo and George] had a terrible argument…
… I'm very grateful to The Listening Project because we were almost not speaking, we went up to Carlisle, we did the interview, and we came out laughing and loving each other again, and um… that kind of is the art of conversation[42]

There is something about the space - the way the physical walls of the recording booth encase participants that encourages conversation. This could be construed as a manipulation of the facts, that participants should actually be reminded of their surroundings and the potential impact and consequences of their conversation throughout their experience. But as it stands, this constructed 'privacy' and protection provided by the studio, a commitment to the time, a microphone set to record – can lead to intimacy in spite of the fact that participants fully understand the conversation is not private at all.

2.2.2 Intimacy

The main goal of TLP is to record participants having "the conversation they were always meant to have".[43] It would appear that TLP provides a comfortable environment for a wide range of participants to feel able to come forward and share intimate moments for the project.

[40] Glover talking to Paula "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4. And Interview with Holly Gilbert at the British Library (London: 08/05/2019). And Steve talking to Fi Glover in Burgess, M. (2016) "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*"*. BBC Radio*,* accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396
[41] Linn, "Fi Glover interviews participants Linn, George and Jo. The Listening Project Live." BBC Radio (2015), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b069jd2p
[42] Jo, "Fi Glover interviews participants Linn, George and Jo. The Listening Project Live." BBC Radio (2015), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b069jd2p

Radio 4's Listening Project booth. Photograph: Nick Kane / Ian Woolcock/BBC[44]

In essence, when the participants are recorded for TLP, it is ultimately to have an *intimate* conversation. It is a lived experience, not generated immediately and with the sole purpose of creating a historical record. Although one of the attractions for participants might be the preservation of their conversation in the British Library, in general, people do not participate specifically to have their conversation disseminated on the radio. According to Graham McKechnie, a producer of TLP, the segment on the BBC is just not as important as *having the conversation*[45]. Participants comment rather on the act of creating the record in and of itself. People do not expect there to be a continued, external interest in their personal conversations. And yet, according to organisers, it is the very nature of a candid and natural conversation, a snapshot of lived experience, that draws in a large audience and generates empathy for them. Rav Sanghera, BBC Sheffield producer for TLP, discusses the space in which this intimacy can flourish:

I can't overstate just how… just what a special space the booth itself is, I love when people came in for the first time and there is this kind of moment of wonder and when you actually close the

[43] "The Listening Project: About." BBC Online, accessed 26/01/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[44] Fi Glover, "The BBC's Listening Project Live Specials: hear the secrets of private lives." *The Guardian.* (2015), accessed 29/04/2020, https://www.theguardian.com/media/tvandradioblog/2015/jun/08/bbc-listening-project-live-specials-fi-glover-hear-the-secrets-private-lives
[45]McKechnie, "The Listening Project" *Next Radio Conference*. (2012), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBN2a9AP7EI

door you get this beautiful hush, this kind of sacredness really, I kind of liken it to a secular confessional box, almost, on wheels. It's beautiful and it was home to some wonderful conversations.[46]

A thread can be followed throughout these interviews: the whole experience of the TLP is constructed. It is all set up to encourage intimacy, from the cups of tea and friendly producers and the driver with the "lovely aura",[47] to the designing of the mobile studio affectionately known as 'Betty Booth'. This mobile studio was introduced in 2015, it was built to take the project to more people around the UK. Jacob Low, the architect of the booth, designed the mobile recording studio-come-caravan and filled it with "homey touches". These touches, like the (imitation) wood-burning stove, are there "to make people feel comfortable" and "steep the experience in nostalgia" right down to the caravan-shaped trailer.[48] Many organisers and participants described being enclosed in a new world in the booth. It is constructed to make everything feel far away and to encourage the participants to overlook the fact that they are being recorded. People "forget about the world outside and then [they are] just focusing on each other",[49] to truly listen to each other and to be given the time to speak on their own terms.

This "confessional box on wheels" is designed to make participants forget, just for a time, that they might be on the radio. It encourages them to think that they are by themselves and that it is okay to relax and to relay intimate thoughts, to open up and 'talk in private'. Even in the more traditional radio studios everything is explained to the participants, arranged and thought through to make the experience as comfortable and relaxed as possible. The organisers have realised that convincing people to have a "chinwag"[50] in a new room is not always easy and that the setting

[46] Rav Sanghera; BBC Sheffield producer, "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*"*. BBC Radio (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396
[47] Fi Glover describing driver Mark; "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*"*. BBC Radio (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396
[48] Jacob Low, "Fi Glover interviews Jacob Low, Rob Perks and Participants Rachel and Geoff: The Listening Project Live." BBC Radio (2015), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z
[49] Unnamed participant, "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[50] Simon Furber BBC Sussex producer, "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*"*. BBC Radio (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396

matters when aiming to create a "safe environment".[51] Over the years the organisers have learned to use "mood lighting, comfy chairs" and more discreet microphones,[52] helping to set the tone for intimate conversation. This constructed intimacy can reveal narratives and viewpoints that would otherwise be difficult to record. Participants, including Erik, whom I interviewed, and Paula and Gerry, who spoke at the British Library Project Workshop in London, reflect on the set up of the recording studios:

The room was a little serious, with the mics set up, but it didn't end up bothering me… the environment of the studio and equipment everywhere made things interesting … I feel like we were forced to dig a bit deeper for conversation topics[53]

when we [Gerry and Paula] recorded, for the first few minutes I was really aware, so we had just a little conversation and cup of coffee and a little chat about stuff and then went it to this room, so the space gets smaller, and it was very kind of womb-like… then the darkness of the room, we were facing each other, utterly silent and the producer wasn't making a noise it did feel like we were alone but, alone in a way that we couldn't just go and make a cup of coffee or, the phone wouldn't go or something, we had to, we were having this conversation[54]

we could have just been in our living room, just having a chat. It became really natural really easy and kind of cathartic.[55]

Intimacy is always in tension with the invisible audience "eavesdropping"[56] on this personal conversation because all at the same time the silent listeners are wanted but forgotten, dreaded but vital. This tension doesn't always initially go unnoticed by the participant, but the space and

[51] Furber, "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road". BBC Radio (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396
[52] Ibidem
[53] Interview with Erik (Edinburgh: 06/05/2019)
[54] Gerry and Paula, "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[55] Gerry and Paula, "The Listening Project Workshop"
[56] Fi Glover quoted in British Library "Press Release: BBC Radio 4's Listening Project, it's surprising what you hear when you listen." *British Library Online* (2012), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bl.uk/press-releases/2012/march/bbc-radio-4s-listening-project-its-surprising-what-you-hear-when-you-listen

conversation create a suspended reality of privacy, as George says in an interview with Fi Glover:

George: you know, you're in a confined space with a relative stranger and within a very short time, you forget that this sort of private intimacy is going to be hideously public
Fi: Let's lose the hideously…(George, laughing in the background "yes")… gloriously public, that's what you mean.[57]

In this interview George sounds comfortable. She has taken part in TLP twice and talks about participating for a third time. But despite Fi's slightly forceful correction of George (above) – perhaps not to discourage listeners from participating themselves – George still has complicated and conflicted feelings about "airing her laundry"[58] for all to hear. Fi Glover does not ask her to explain these feeling, or acknowledge that some people may feel this way, which is a valid reaction to publicising private moments.

However, it is made clear, at all times in the process, that the participants have control over their conversation, not just where it leads or the content, but in its access. As I was told several times when at the studios to be recorded in conversation with Erik - when signing contracts, before the conversation and after the mic was off - we both have power over what is ultimately heard. We can censor parts of the audio ourselves, which Erik decided to do, or decide which sections should not be included in the redacted broadcast, which I opted for as I wasn't ready for some people to hear what I had said, and the option to close access to the recording at the British Library. This can also be done retroactively because participants have the right to 'put a block' on their conversation after it has been placed with the British Library, or even to pull the recording completely. Nonetheless, according to Holly Gilbert this power is not often used. Very few participants have retracted permission for their conversations to be accessed, and the longest block on any conversation currently stands at 35 years (the reasons for these actions have not been made public). Holly was quick to add that this is not an exhaustive list of measures and that

[57] Fi Glover and George, "Fi Glover interviews participants Linn, George and Jo. The Listening Project Live." BBC Radio (2015), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b069jd2p
[58] George speaks to her partner Jo about love and laundry etiquette in their conversation: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pcwrm

more stringent protections can be applied if asked for,[59] including redactions of sensitive information, distorting voices, pseudonyms or having limited access points. The participants are ready to be intimate because they remain in control of the conversation, and whether it should remain private.

All of the above creates an atmosphere designed to stimulate the conversations that TLP is now known for. For a period of time it was possible for participants to record themselves, at home or in their own space, on their phone or another recording device and upload it to the collection or send it to a local producer. Interestingly, although it was originally possible to create this user-generated content through 'listener uploads', this function stopped after a year, as Victoria puts it; "it didn't take off".[60] It is something that could be re-introduced, but there are not any plans to do so at the moment.[61] Perhaps this is because there is something about the constructed recording space and to knowing you cannot "just go and make a cup of coffee"[62] that appeals to people. Although it also may have been due to the low quality of audio not being consistent or high grade enough for Radio 4 broadcast, which brings into question the project's priorities. Handing over more control to participant is vital in gaining the trust of participants.

2.2.3 Outreach

Through the balance of a "public sharing of private truths" that Tony Philips uses to describe the project at its initiation in 2012, the project organisers use tools to increase listenership and intimacy. Participants are encouraged in this constructed physical and metaphysical space to divulge intimate stories and private conversations. To be able to participate in this way, people need to trust the project and the people and institutions behind it. It is also not enough to wait for people to come forward; to have engaging and varied content for the listenership, the project also needs to source people to come in and participate. Tony Philips touches on issues of trust during the project workshop at the British Library:

[59] Interview with Holly Gilbert at the British Library (London: 08/05/2019)
[60] Interview with Victoria McArthur at the BBC Scotland offices (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[61] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[62] Gerry, "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

it's about relinquishing some of that power and some of that authority and giving the space over to the participants, the audiences and um… learning from it, I *hope* that's what we are achieving, we're still working on it… that's the aim…[The producers are the] secret ingredient… it's the producers in whom the participants put their trust, and that is… I can't really state that highly enough, it's an extraordinary skill.[63]

Here Philips describes the organisation's awareness of power imbalances existing between interviewers/producers and their participants. Conventionally, oral histories or radio documentaries have an interviewer/presenter guiding or outright controlling the questions, tone, pace and length of a segment. In TLP only "some" of that power is being surrendered, but it already creates a different relationship with priorities in theory shifting from end output to process. The focus is on the people first, the radio show and archives second. This level of personal care and commitment to the participants is vital in building trust between the parties. As Philips says, this is down predominantly to the producers as point of contact for the project. Here, producer for BBC Radio Newcastle, Steve, reflects on a more emotional conversation and how he reacted to it and gave the participants the support and time they needed:

they were talking about somebody they'd lost and, it was incredibly moving and when they were finished, we just sort of sat around a little bit, before we let the world back in again. I mean for me just to be trusted, that conversation was, was an amazing thing…[64]

The elements of institutionalised boundaries or bureaucracy are minimised and there is human face to them. The process is patient, personal, kind and at its core *human*. The producer facilitates this by breaking down the walls of two huge-scale institutions: the BBC and the BL. They do this by being present in the project with the participants, they are invited into the space to be witness to the conversation, they are a direct, and human, point of contact. This is particularly important when it comes to people who might not have a relationship with the BBC

[63] Philips "The Listening Project Workshop"
[64] Steve Drayton, BBC Newcastle producer, "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*". BBC Rad*io (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396

or feel that the BBC and this project "is not for them"[65] or simply might be intimidated by an institution[66] particularly one that is hugely bureaucratic, led by "well paid white men" [67] and continued imperial connotations and colonial legacies. It is a key challenge for the project as the organisers hope to represent a wide range of voices, including, or perhaps especially, those who are not associated with Radio 4.

As BBC Scotland producer Victoria says, TLP is aiming to record "a broad diversity of different people and conversations", she says: "I especially enjoy diverse voices, accents and dialects not usually heard on Radio 4", to expose the listeners to other voices, "it is important that we try to represent the whole of the UK". [68] 'Diversity', 'diverse' and 'mix' are all mentioned with high frequency in the collected interviews especially when distinguishing the participants and their conversations from the 'typical' BBC Radio 4 audience. The organisers are particularly looking to collect voices different from the polite, polished and grammatically correct voice, accent and language that dominates Radio 4. TLP is also described by Rob Perks as recording 'ordinary' people, or challenging the majority of 'elite' stories held in archives.[69]

After an audience member challenges the organisers at the British Library Project Workshop about the degree to which the conversations only represent Radio 4 listeners, Glover is quite defensive:

the one group we're *not* actually managing to get is the super-rich and extremely… uh elite people, actually the project is *way* more representative of people who aren't in the Radio 4 demographic than people who are.[70]

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[65] Linda Ingham, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[66] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[67] The New Statesmen "Leader: The BBC is a virtuous institution" *The anti-Trump Issue* (2016), accessed 12/06/2020, https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/05/leader-bbc-virtuous-institution
[68] The New Statesmen "Leader" accessed 12/06/2020, https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/05/leader-bbc-virtuous-institution
[69] Rob Perks, "Fi Glover interviews Jacob Low, Rob Perks and Participants Rachel and Jeff. The Listening Project Live." *BBC Radio 4* (2015), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z

[70] Fi Glover, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

There is little room for debate or criticism in the workshop, which would have been a good opportunity to listen and review aspects of the project that could be improved. Glover implies that the BBC Radio 4 listenership is mostly made up the super-rich and elite, and that they are in the minority of the participants. She may be correct on the numbers, but the criticism is still valid as there is a continued perception from some audience members of a lack of diversity. Unfortunately there are no published demographics about the participants available to corroborate or counter Glover's opinion. Nonetheless, according to Holly, the project archivist at the British Library, "someone at the BBC did some kind of an analysis on [TLP] and there is a sort of older, white British demographic that slightly dominates",[71] which, contrary to Fi Glovers response, *would* match the usual listenership of the Radio 4.[72] The radio is probably the main entry point to the project so the organisers need to create different points of access if the project is to be "*way* more representative" [73] of non-listeners in the future.

The organisers are tackling this aim for wider representation, in part, by launching the mobile-booth – TLP caravan driven across the UK- which helps gain "a big geographical mix"[74] of participants. Geography aside, however, the supporters of the project, such as artist Linda Ingham, recognise that "sometimes there are hard to reach groups, often because those are the people that are unlikely to come forward themselves".[75] There is some awareness of "gaps",[76] as Rob Perks says, in the collection, of people unlikely to come forward to participate. Because TLP is an ongoing project, as Holly reflected in her interview, there are opportunities for a cycle of assessment and adaptation,[77] such as the British Library project workshop, to re-consider these gaps and changing the approaches the project takes to address them. This is also visible in the directed way producers and organisers make efforts to identify underrepresented voices and how they might rectify this going forward with the project. Some producers, such as Victoria,

[71] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)
[72] BBC Trust Service Review *BBC Speech Radio Service Review: Radio 4, Radio 4 Extra, Radio 5 live and Radio 5 live Sports Extra* (2015), accessed 29/04/2019, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/speech_radio/speech_radio.pdf
[73] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)
[74] Ibidem
[75] Linda Ingham, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[76] Rob Perks, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[77] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)

understand that getting "every voice in the mix" is impossible as, "some voices will always go untold".[78] But there, is in spite of this, "hope"[79] from others, like Holly, that the project will eventually contain "everybody's voice", that people will be able to see (or hear) themselves, or someone like them and their stories, represented in the collection.[80]

Past the geographical advantages of the caravan, by parking the booth in highly visible areas across the UK, people "can say 'ay-up whatcha doin'?'".[81] Participants are intrigued by the temporary site and will come in to find out what it is about and potentially to participate. This mobility can then be used to target certain communities, neighbourhoods or sectors. It can be used to reach out to build trust and relationships in different areas. The idea is that it will increase diversity by collecting from, as BBC Cumbria producer says, different "social, racial, ability, sexual orientation" and age groups.[82] He and his fellow producers, Victoria and Alice, go on to describe how they engage in outreach:

We've been encouraged right from the beginning to go and work with charities, groups and organisations it's very important that we bring people into TLP fold [83]

I collaborate, you know, with outreach groups, advocacy groups, that kind of thing and being based there meant… they could actually come straight to the booth and record conversations[84]

Oasis playground has a very developed inclusion programme, so I was very keen to record a very diverse ranges of voices including many children with disabilities so this conversation represents that as well.[85]

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[78] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[79] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)
[80] Ibidem
[81] Steve Drayton, BBC Newcastle producer, "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*". BBC Rad*io (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396
[82] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)
[83] Andrew Carter, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[84] Victoria McArthur, BBC Scotland producer, "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*". BBC Rad*io (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396

By working with organisations and community projects that have already created an environment of trust, TLP aims to connect with wider range potential participants. This is aided by using social media to expand outreach, BBC Sussex producer Simon explains:

we made sure anyone who was interested in taking part got to hear about it, so we attacked the history forums for instance, chatrooms, Facebook, Twitter and so on[86]

TLP has its own Facebook account, and is also promoted on the Radio 4 channels and the producers themselves will promote conversations on their own channels and when the mobile-booth travels it often is picked up by local news.[87] Nonetheless, there are always limitations to outreach in the same way as there is an inevitability about missing some voices from the collection. Victoria[88] in particular talked about areas, or members of the public who may have limited access to the project, or indeed, the organisers may have a limited access to those people. For example, secure locations or prisons are difficult to include in the parameters of the project.

The diversity of the project is also limited by the difficulties presented by an open access collection which means the conversations are then accessible to everyone. This may be problematic for people who are witnesses, victims, survivors, whistle-blowers and other vulnerable peoples who may be participating in the project, nonetheless there are some examples of such conversations in the project: Chrissy and Larrissa talking about prison life and drugs,[89] or Mary and Pearl who are sexual assault survivors,[90] domestic assault survivors Mariah and

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[85] Alice Williams, BBC Radio London producer, "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*". BBC Rad*io (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396

[86] Simon Furber BBC Sussex producer, "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*". BBC Rad*io (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396

[87]Vidinova, N. "Listening Project Radio Show Invites Dundonians to Share Thoughts on Life". *The Courier* (2018), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/local/dundee/684851/listening-project-radio-show-invites-dundonians-to-share-thoughts-on-life/

[88] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)

[89] Chrissy and Larissa – Life After Drugs and Prison *The Listening Project* (2018) BBC Radio 4, accessed 21/03/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0001cc8

[90] Mary and Pearl - Sisters and Survival *The Listening Project* (2014) BBC Radio 4, accessed 21/03/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04368fh

Sarah,[91] or Rab and Margaret talk about Rab becoming a whistleblower,[92] to name a few. TLP organisers hope that by giving over more control and power to participants, whoever they are, anyone who wants to will feel it is safe to participate. Producers Linda and Victoria explain:

more importantly they feel they *can* engage with [TLP], they see it as something open to them now which perhaps they might not have done before[93]

Protections are given in anonymity, in changing names and in some cases voice actors. Nonetheless reaching out, gaining trusting and reassuring people "of a safe space is a hard task"[94]

That said, in spite of "relinquishing" some power and authority, a continuing power structure exists between participants and organisers. It is at the BBC's "invitation" that someone can take part. Without listener-uploads, selection (both to participate and then in the broadcasting) is carried out by the producers. There seems to be a blind spot in the project about the relationship between producer and participants even though it is talked about throughout these interviews. TLP organisers are at pains to stress that the conversation is in the hands of the participant: "they are in charge".[95] But they are not really: they are *given* controls and "opportunities".[96] The producers do not set out to record a particular topic: it is a "clean sheet"[97] for the participants. But in practice, they do: through their extensive outreach, the BBC even do call outs on twitter for participants to come in and talk about a particular topic e.g. to come talk about Brexit. According to organisers, anyone can take part, Holly describes participants as "self-selecting".[98] However, they have to be initially selected by the producer. Participants may control the

[91] Maria and Sarah: Safe at Last *The Listening Project* (2012) BBC Radio 4, accessed 21/03/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01ntlsr
[92]Rab and Margaret - Clearing My Name *The Listening Project* (2015) BBC Radio 4, accessed 21/03/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04yk0jh
[93] Linda Walker, BBC Suffolk producer, "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[94] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[95] Linda Walker, BBC Suffolk producer, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[96] Fi Glover interviewing Linn, Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews participants Linn, George and Jo. The Listening Project Live". *BBC Radio 4* (2015), accessed 29/05/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b069jd2p
[97] Fi Glover, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[98] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)

structure and form of the conversation, but the producers set them up, tell them where to sit, manage the equipment and sometimes 'nudge' the conversation too as described earlier when Victoria gets her participant to ask questions rather than continue a monologue. Fi Glover posits that there is no "prescriptive" atmosphere,[99] yet everything is designed to create intimacy: as one participant, Kate, describes it, it is a "theatricalised space".[100] Even the very idea that "it belongs to the people who contribute to it"[101] as Fi Glover says during the British Library Project Workshop is romantic. There is no copyright, therefore the recordings of the conversations belong to everyone, or no one, and the British Library are the custodians, not the participants themselves.

This is not to assume hypocrisy on the part of the organisers of TLP, but rather, to highlight the fact that TLP is not free of the biases that may come from the relationship between the present/absent producer/interviewer. The producer and the production are at once invisible and yet visible because they are central to the creation of the conversation and to the success of the project. It is in them that the participants must place their trust, it is their faces that humanise the institutions, it is their presence and work that enriches the conversation or creates the feeling that the participants need to "dig deeper"[102] and "just have the conversation".[103] And yet the participants are not there to engage with the producers, the radio broadcast does not include the producers and sometimes the producers' input is omitted from the archived version of the conversation as well.

2.2.4 Absent Interviewer

As has already been noted, one of the key differences between TLP and traditional oral history is that in TLP the conversation is between two participants who already know each other and there

[99] Fi Glover, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[100] Participant Kate, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[101] Fi Glover, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[102] Interview with Erik (Edinburgh: 06/05/2019)
[103] Participant Gerry, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

is no conventional interviewer. Oral Historian Joanna Bornat comments on how this has benefitted the content of the project in terms of engaging in intimate or "sensitive topics":

Getting round that sensitive topic [violent crime/time spent in prison] within their relationship was something I thought, maybe, another researcher might find harder to do … hard to reach and sensitive topics are within *this* collection[104]

Organisers say that because interviews are always through "the prism of the interviewer, through a filter",[105] the idea is to try to remove the interviewer, and in some way, this 'filter'. My conversation producer, Victoria, described how she had to "recalibrate" as a producer to give people the space they needed to conduct their own rhythm and conversation. Archivist Holly Gilbert says, "the differences make [TLP] a really positive and valuable contribution"[106] to archives and historical record. The difference between TLP and conventional oral history create the opportunity for unique, historically and culturally valuable recordings, it is what gives the project more perceived authenticity than the conventional format. There are few instances where researchers can access natural, unscripted conversation, especially on this scale and with such a range of dialects, accents and emotions. By removing the interviewer and relying on the existing connection between participants, participants do not feel the need to provide context that the other person already has, to introduce topics or build a rapport. They can quickly have deep, emotional and detailed conversation.

Yet, as has been discussed, the producers are very much present in TLP. Their role goes further than outreach, trust building and point of contact. It is important to recognise that the role of the producer may not be dissimilar to that of the conventional oral historian/interviewer. As participant Paula remarks about her own conversation:

[104] Joanna Bornat, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[105] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[106] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)

[We were] allowed to have that time, um together, alone as it were, but not quite alone, um to talk things through, and I don't think a lot of people are allowed that time.[107]

It is easy for listeners to forget that the participants talking were "not quite alone" when they were recorded for the three-minute snippets on Radio 4. The project generally emphasises the producers' non-role in the conversations and that participants can talk as if alone – this being the key to the important intimacy they try to convey. But it is important to remember that the producer *was* there: "[producers] have to recognise privilege, we are the gatekeepers to information".[108] Negotiating the absence/presence of the producer does not mean that the impact of their input needs to be disguised or repaired, but it does need to be recognised because it is sometimes the presence of the producer, similar to that of the microphones and booth, that leads to the deeper conversations. In other words, the presence of the producer can benefit the conversation, so it is not necessarily a negative aspect of TLP, what can be negative is denying the producers' impact. Jo and Gerry talk about the presence of the producer during their recording sessions:

I think someone else coming into the situation and saying, you know, would you like to talk about this in a safe environment, where you can sit and discuss things and it's not going to be held against you or anything they just seemed to need an invitation to sit down and actually do it.[109]

I think that the producer helped far more then she hindered that conversation[110]

The participants here value the presence of the producer. This investment from the producer, and the empathy that they imbue, can affect everyone involved. By being granted this privilege, to be included in potentially emotional and personal storytelling, any supposed neutrality or distance from the project is removed. Organisers, and particularly producers, can be affected by the

[107] Participant Paula, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[108] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[109] Participant Jo, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[110] Participant Gerry, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

project too. Some producers have formed relationships with participants, or feel inclined to check-in with them after recording their conversation.[111] BBC Wales producer Lynne reflects on a particularly emotional session:

When we finished recording, I was in tears, Trish was in tears and there was just a lot of love in the room, it was just a lovely, lovely, lovely hour… I think generally, the experience helped me reconnect with Wales and being Welsh, and I think that was a pretty special thing for me.[112]

While not every one of the thousands of conversations will have this kind of effect, the project *could* have a lasting impact on all involved, as shown above not everyone is immune to the intimacies shared in the conversations. The hope is that the conversations will have an impact on listeners as well. TLP challenges the boundaries of recorder-participant, interviewee-interviewer, producer-guest. It challenges conventional oral history.

Over the last five decades not much has changed in oral history. In the UK at least it has continued to concentrate mainly on people "coming to the end of their lives".[113] Oral historians continue to try to fill the gaps by seeking particular voices and concentrating research on themes of historical interest. Although technology has transformed recording, the process and interview exchange has remained more or less the same. For this reason it can be argued that TLP challenges oral historians to reflect more on what oral history really is, could and should be. Joanna Bornat and Rob Perks use the British Library Project workshop to percolate on the misalignment of the project vis-a-vis conventional oral history:

This has been really interesting because, um, TLP *isn't* oral history so it's opened my eyes in lots of ways, and made we think about oral history and also about what TLP is"…"Participant control is quite an important thing for an oral historian to reflect on[114]

[111] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019); Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)
[112] Lynne Rosser, BBC Wales producer, Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*". BBC Radio* (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396
[113] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)
[114] Joanna Bornat, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

Is there something we [oral historians] could take from this particular format that's useful for us?[115]

It is my argument that there is something that, not only oral historians, but also archivists can take from TLP. Through both conscious and indirect actions TLP uses a variety of methods – outreach, active producer involvement in selection and creation of conversations, humanising institutions, sharing of control of the process with participants - to increase diversity. There are areas the project could improve on as well such as the blind spots in the limitations of outreach and the demographics of the participants, the lack of perception of the producer input and the inherent biases in this input. Institutional archives have an opportunity to learn more about diversity from both the methods of TLP and its limitations.

2.3 Summary of key findings

The Listening Project is a remarkable collection and continues to grow and evolve to include more voices every year. These voices are varied, there are different accents and dialects, they represent people from a range of backgrounds, ages and ethnicities, and people connected by different relationships. They tell stories and talk of experiences that cover a multitude of topics. TLP considers itself to be diverse because of the range of participants who take part. It is my contention however that the diversity ought to be measured, not as a series of outcomes, but rather as a series of actions. Rather than evaluating the variations in participants, I have analysed the methodology, the practices and the aims behind TLP processes.

Listening and aurality are central to TLP. The project revolves around the core principle that everyone has a right to tell their story *and* that there is value in listening to everyone's story. The organisers' hope this value is shared by the listeners, that they might relate to, and perhaps feel they are represented by, those who participate in the project, and by the participants who are recognised and listened to. The archival promise is made to the participants so that their story is preserved for years to come, that it may become part of their legacy. Even though there is a

[115] Rob Perks, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

tension between private and the public spheres TLP works hard to keep those two spheres in balance.

The private conversations of TLP are facilitated, encouraged and maintained by TLP producers who aid in the recordings. Their presence reassures the participants but also adds seriousness and encourages the participants to use all the time they have been given to talk and listen fully often leading to participants wanting to talk about things they usually would not. The space they are given is built specifically for the participants and their needs. It is reassuring, made to feel comfortable and safe. 'Betty Booth', TLP's 'caravan', in particular, encourages intimacy and makes participants feel able to share, no matter where they are and who eventually may hear. The booth also connects the project to the public.

Driving the booth to different locations across the UK and advertising TLP locations across social media and other public platforms maximises TLP outreach. Outreach is also a central role for the producers. The producers are encouraged to collaborate with communities that they identify as underrepresented in TLP so far. By working with charities and local community-run centres TLP can connect with harder to reach 'voices'. Trust is a vital component of these collaborations to make sure participants know they have some control over the conversation, and in building relationships between any producer and participant.

The producer/participant relationship reveals the extent to which producers *are* in fact involved in the creation of conversations and the collection as a whole. Despite the producers not participating in the conversations and being completely absent from the BBC segments as they are broadcast, the producers are very much present. There is no conventional interviewer but the producer often carries out tasks that a conventional interviewer would do. So, for example the producer selects, organises, records and 'nudges' the conversation in directions they consider interesting. Furthermore, the co-participants in any conversation each take on the role of interviewer and interviewee at different points in that conversation.

In these producer-outreach-interviewer roles there are biases. TLP does recognise the importance of sharing power, and that producers are in a privileged position. Nonetheless, there is a blind

spot in TLP's failure to recognise the extent of biases in the project. For example, producers have a hand in every element of the conversation, and conversations can have an emotional impact on them as well as the participants. The metadata in the British Library catalogue includes the producer's name as 'recordist' but this does not describe the true extent of their involvement. There is no information in the archives about who wrote the description of the conversation; as the project archivist at the British Library, Holly, says she normally obtains the description from the producer on transfer of the recording.[116] There is no information about unrecorded input, for example, the producers' comments and questions before and during breaks in the conversation, or if there are redacted parts of the recording, or why the producer selected these particular participants to be recorded. It means that the diversity of TLP relies more than is admitted on the subjectivity of the producers and organisers. Producer biases exist, and do affect the outcome.

Through these tools TLP actively addresses the diversity of the project and of BBC Radio 4. While there are perhaps clear connections between this project and oral history collections, I aim, in the final chapter, to pull out the elements that can be used be archivists at institutions that hold more than just oral collections. For example, the IISH holds a plethora of material, from paper to video, from audio to buttons. By applying TLP tools to this context perhaps archives, too, can learn to listen.

[116] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)

CHAPTER 3: APPLYING TLP TOOLS TO INSTITUTIONAL ARCHIVES

The concept of diversity has been evolving over the last decade and public institutions are at the centre of debates around diversity in public knowledge, shared culture and historical representation. Increasing 'diversity' in archives is a new name for an issue that has been debated in archival science since academics, particularly social historians, challenged hegemonic epistemology of objective and singular narratives in the 1970s. It was this status quo that historian Howard Zinn rejected and called on fellow historians and archivists to rebel against.[1]

In this chapter I will position my argument about TLP techniques in the greater context of growing diversity discourse and how they might be implemented by an institutional archive, like the IISH. This will be organised around the principles borrowed from diversity studies – representation, recognition and providing. The tools employed by TLP will be examined in relation to the current landscape of the diversity debate and the criticisms of the concept.

The landscape of the contemporary diversity discourse has become interdisciplinary and "nebulous".[2] In today's hugely varied and sprawling abundance of information online, the non-academic and unpublished additions to the discourse are more easily accessible and, furthermore, considering the topic - challenging the status quo - sources outside the world of academia provide valuable commentary on the newly emerging picture of diversity in archives. 'Non-academic' additions and a cross-disciplinary approach to diversity in the archives, within a contemporary context, are necessary because, in archival literature, diversity continues to be an underserved topic.[3]

Before continuing with my discussion, it is important to refer to the three main criticisms of the term 'diversity' which is such a contentious and complex concept. First, diversity can be counterproductive if it is used to perpetuate an 'us/them' divide. This uses 'diversity' as a concept to describe that which, or who, is not already in the archive, 'diverse' using this

[1] Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives, and the public interest", *The Midwestern Archivist 2* (2) (1977): 14-26, there 25
[2] Helen Wong Smith, "Diversity and Inclusion in Archiving" *Moving Image Archive News* (2018), accessed 24/06/2020, http://www.movingimagearchivenews.org/diversity-and-inclusion-in-archiving/
[3] Smith, "Diversity and Inclusion in Archiving" accessed 24/06/2020, http://www.movingimagearchivenews.org/diversity-and-inclusion-in-archiving/

interpretation is that which is other. Professor of anthropology Ghassan Hage argues that this mentality is what makes diversity a 'white' word.[4] It is used to designate 'normality vs difference', the norm being white, hetero, male, able, middle/upper-class, and 'Western'. Using 'diversity' to describe everything around this 'norm' emphasises the privileges of one group, which has the authority and power to invite the 'other' to join in, under certain conditions. Second, diversity does not consider who is oppressing and silencing, it does not consider intersectionality or compounded discrimination.[5] Third, Kassim, a researcher and curator, is also wary of diversity being used to ease white guilt which can lead to white amnesia.[6] With this there is the danger of 'diversity' becoming just another bureaucratic procedure to check boxes and move on without instilling any meaningful, lasting social, political or cultural change.

It is my contention that by addressing diversity as *action* rather than outcome we can go some way towards addressing these concerns. It is in action that change comes rather than tokenistic approaches to diversity. My discussion uses the three elements of recognition, representation and providing from Vertovec's *Handbook on Diversity Studies*[7] to show how the methods of TLP could be achieve greater diversity in institutional archives:

- *Recognition*, aimed at addressing historical and enduring cultural harm
- *Representation*, aiming to create institutions that reflect the public they serve, often through quotas or initiatives
- *Providing*, ensuring that spaces, e.g. businesses have the adequate measures in place to meet the needs of their myriad of users

Looking into what institutional archives can learn from TLP, and referring to the cross disciplinary discussion on diversity, my main arguments are:

- Archival institutions, their users and archivists, need to first recognise a lack of diversity in the collections. This should be a cyclical process of assessment and re-evaluation

[4] Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Routledge ; Annandale, NSW : Pluto Press, New York, NY, 2000)
[5] Sumaya Kassim, "The Museum will not be decolonized" *Media Diversified* (2017), accessed 20/06/2020, https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/
[6] Kassim, "The Museum will not be decolonized" accessed 20/06/2020, https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/
[7] Steven Vertovec, "Introduction" in *Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies*, ed. S. Vertovec (New York: Routledge, 2015): 1-20 there 3.

- It is important for archivists to recognise their privilege and biases
- And for archivists to recognise the value in alternative forms and formats of records
- Through increased representation, participation and collaboration with archival creators an increase in diversity is possible
- Everyone should have the opportunity to represent themselves. To facilitate this democratic ideal, archives provide and become 'safe(r) spaces' that people can trust

These elements of diversity are *active* and action-based. In TLP, as in all forms of oral history, orality is a key factor, but it is not what makes it diverse. The method is more important that the format. As each element is addressed I will also look at examples of how these actions can be taken.

3.1 Recognition

When exploring the techniques employed by the organisers of TLP, it was clear that one of the project's aims is to collect a wide range of contributions for their collection, but producers are particularly interested in recording and disseminating voices that are 'missing' from Radio 4, in terms of accent and language, but also in terms of background and experience. The organisers recognise a lack of representation from 'non-elites' on Radio 4[8] and by doing so try to expose listeners to these other voices.[9] During the oral history movement of the 1970s historians and pioneers of the movement argued that there was a need for a greater range of narratives in the archive, particularly those from 'non-elites'.[10] There was a lack of 'history from below'; for example, a lack of working-class, women's and Black history.[11] To successfully increase diversity in archives, the first step is to acknowledge a need to do so. If archivists, users and historians do not recognise a lack of diversity in the archives, nothing is going to change.

[8] Glover, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[9] British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4; Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[10] Studs Terkel quoted in Siobhán McHugh, "The Affective Power of Sound: Oral History on the Radio" In Rob Perks & Alistair Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 490-507., there 494
[11] Alistair Thomson, "Oral History and Community History in Britain: Personal and Critical Reflections on Twenty-Five Years of Continuity and Change", *Oral History 36*(1) (2008): 95-104, there 96

The TLP organisers' recognition of a lack of diversity has led to action. However in current diversity discourse across academic disciplines the dimensions of diversity have expanded, and the targets/quotas for inclusion in historical collections of particular categories of difference have been dropped.[12] To focus on a particular person or community in collection policies is to potentially ignore other gaps. In light of this, TLP's approach could be problematic by centralising the voices already on Radio for as the 'norm' and differentiating the missing voices as other. To somewhat combat this, TLP organisers are continually assessing and re-evaluating the gaps in the collection to try and rectify imbalances or silences. They are not always successful in this, but are aided by the archivists at the British Library and their producers who do the ground work, for example producers feeding back data about the participants they have interviewed via the information forms and taking an interest in outreach themselves, in communities they feel are underserved. Processes of assessment and re-evaluation in institutional archives could be implemented through collection policies; creating these as documents that are fluid and changeable rather than one-size-fits-all rigid policy, creating policies that can be revised and updated continually to reflect the gaps that have identified by researchers, archive creators and the archivists themselves. This can be particularly useful in institutes such as the IISH that have an integrated research department alongside the collections department, both focused on the social impact of labour relations in this case. In this way institutional archives can work towards being more socially relevant as they adapt to the changes in the societies, communities or fields of interest they mean to represent.

The success of this process of assessment and action is dependent on the organisers, on the 'makers' of the collection, on their choices. The oral history movement, influenced by social historians and social justice movements of the time, challenged the perception of an objective, neutral history.[13] Using this foundational social argument, all actors are by nature subjective, and all choices they make are subjective. Each part of the collection development, management and handling involves multi-level decision making processes, and these choices also effect the overall archive and its diversity. My analysis defined this as a blind spot for TLP organisers, who fail to recognise the extent and reach of the biases in the project. This is particularly the case

[12] Caldera, Mary A., and Kathryn M. Neal. (Eds.), *Through the archival looking glass: A reader on diversity and inclusion*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2014), XXI
[13] Rob Perks & Alistair Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015), 6

with regards to the affect each producer has on the selection process and the conversation that makes it to the archive. Some producers recognise the privilege of their position, Victoria, a BBC Scotland producer, explicitly says in my interview with her; "[producers] have to recognise privilege, we are the gatekeepers to information",[14] she is explaining her views on giving access to 'private' conversations on the radio. Often this privilege is in relation to being trusted with, and included in, the personal nature of the conversations, rather than handling the recording or selecting the participants in the first instance. Trust in the process is considered vital and highly valued by the organisers. Producer for BBC Radio Newcastle, Steve, describes the trust participants place in him after a particularly taxing conversation as "an amazing thing".[15] While building relationships of trust is core to the success of the project and to engaging more participants, there is little consideration to the amount of bias involved in the decisions leading up to a conversation. For example, who, out of those who apply for their own TLP conversation, is chosen to be recorded, or how much 'nudging' of the conversation do producers take on before and during the records process. There are also processes actors are involved in after the recording that can affect the outcome. For example, producers decide which part of the conversation should be cut and which kept for the broadcast, and the staff at the BBC or BL writes the title and abstract for the record. Currently there is no record of these actions, they are not explicitly acknowledged - no specific person is accountable for it. This is a key criticism of oral history in general; invisible biases are inherent in unclear decisions why a certain subject was chosen, not making it clear what was ignored, not making it clear who was involved and why. Recognition of bias and accountability is just as important in institutional archives as it is for TLP, not only for oral records but all materials.

Archivists can explicitly acknowledge their hand in the creation of the archival record and recognise the affects their decisions could have to the historical landscape and how researchers may encounter them to be more transparent about their processes. Archivists themselves do not need to assume what or how it may affect the record, but all their decision points can be clearly noted in the archival process and their reasons for taking these decisions. This is necessary so

[14] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[15] Steve Drayton, BBC Newcastle, Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews producers after a year of the mobile booth: The Listening Project on the Road*". BBC Radi*o (2016), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396

that people who are using the archive can understand the context of the record and the collection. Transparency in archivist's actions will also benefit the cycle of assessment and adaptation, as future archivists can understand past decisions of their predecessors. At the IISH small notes are made in the content and context metadata of the collection,[16] but only at a top level of collection management. There are no notes on the selection process or record creation. As the institute moves to adapt new accession database software there may be more opportunity to register further decisions for further transparency.

Records could also include information about how the collection was acquired and the relationship between the creator and the collection. TLP producers are encouraged to collaborate with communities and organisations, and to apply outreach methods to their work and yet information about this is not available. Producers are actively taking part in the creation of the record, a method that reflects the principles of the oral history movement. Although early advocates of oral history tried to find ways to combat the subjectivity in interviewing to try to conform to mainstream historical and archival standards, the movement quickly begun to recognise and embrace subjectivity as part of the oral history method.[17] Subjectivity was not something to be overcome but to be used to the advantage of the collections - archivists, researchers and historians have experience and understanding of an archive that can assist them in making the next set of decisions. To form a relationship with the creators and to become involved with the process can support the development of the collection. These relationships are not free from emotion. TLP producers show care and empathy, and sometimes have lasting relationships with their participants, Victoria for example described repeated contact with a participant whose words had struck a particular cord with her.[18] Oral historians were aware of how their feelings could affect interviews,[19] there is no acknowledgement or self-reflection on how the producers' feelings could affect conversations.

[16] "Archief Koster Collection Summary" IISH online (2020), accessed 20/06/2020, https://search.iisg.amsterdam/Record/ARCH02391
[17] Perks & Thomson, *The oral history reader,* 5-7
[18] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019); Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019); Linn, Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews participants Linn, George and Jo. The Listening Project Live." *BBC Radio* (2015), accessed 20/06/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b069jd2p
[19] Perks & Thomson, *The oral history reader,* 6

There is precedent for archivists to work with collections while embracing their own subjectivity, already by actively engaging with the process of collecting records from communities, taking an active role in changing the archival landscape and for engaging with the creators not just the materials. St. Onge, an archivist working with Indigenous Canadian collections, is a firm advocate for archives and archivists being more assertive in prioritising narratives that are silenced and from communities that ought, and want to be archived,[20] taking this action is a positive subjective process that acknowledges current inequalities. Recognising and embracing subjectivity is important to internal archival processes, but also as part of the effort to change the image of the institutional archive. This cannot be overstated: the institution is not neutral.

Increasing trust and active outreach was a key tenet derived from my analysis of TLP, and in this is the breaking down of barriers between the institutions and the people in and around them – through building subjective relationships with producers. To begin to break down some of the barriers that tend to create windowless bureaucratic impersonal archival institutions, archivists can reach through and humanise their institutions, taking note of how TLP attempts to humanise the BBC and BL with its hands-on producers.

Subjectivity is also core to the material itself. A continuing criticism of oral history and oral testimony is the subjectivity, and therefore – according to the critics – unreliable and not as trustworthy as written documentation. This disregards the subjectivity of all historical narrative, and furthermore as Portelli, Bornat and Thompson argued that oral history has allowed researchers to amass information about individuals and communities that lack written languages, and provided them with appropriate spaces in which to comment about their experiences, thereby revealing a "rich and varied source" of a wider range of human experience.[21] To recognise the value of subjectivity at every level of the archive challenges the notion of singular objective history-as-truth. Embracing subjectivity introduces histor*ies* and multi-narrative truth*s*.

[20] Anna St. Onge interview by Arya Schudson, "Archival Labor, Community Content & Refocusing the Archival Narrative." *Archivist's Alley* November 26, 2018, http://archivistsalley.com/2018/11/
[21] Paul Thompson & Joanna Bornat, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* 4th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7

TLP collects multiple conversations around a singular moment or topic. Brexit, for example, was a current topic that engaged the public for a long time in the UK and the BBC curated listening segments on Brexit from different viewpoints.[22] This can be problematic when some listeners do not feel enough narratives are being reflected, on a private BBC complaints forum, one listener voiced their concern: "This whole series has been bias towards remainers hardly any Leave voters interviewed to give a balanced programme. A succession of people churning out the same old issues".[23] This could be reflective of the bias Kathleen Blee wishes the archivist to be more aware of, they "have paid less attention to the life stories of ordinary people whose political agendas they find unsavoury".[24] Blee, contemporary oral historian, argues this can skew history, as the archive fills with narratives of those who historians, archivists, producers agree with, while others are silenced. Again a process of assessment and re-evalutation can shed more light on over-weighted narratives and missing voices of dissent. Blee argues for the inclusion of narratives that do not agree with society's collective version of events.[25]

TLP's focus on conversation follows the oral history movement's core of oral records, but even further dismantles the need to conform to what can be considered an oral history collection and archival record. TLP, in not conforming to the guidelines of conventional oral history, by deconstructing the interview dynamic and research question basis for recording, further returns to the calls from pioneers of oral history to reject the rules of who or what 'belongs' in the archive.[26] The oral record, the conversation, testimony and personal narrative challenges and changes what an archival record can be. Recognising this is central to increasing diversity.

New formats and forms of record in the archive require the restructuring of catalogues, digital viewers, access controls and collecting practices to facilitate and support such new records.

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[22] "Taking it Personally" *The Listening Project: Referendum Tales* (2016), accessed 20/06/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07zzr8w
[23] "Listening Project" *BBC Complaints: Help Stop BBC EU Bias* (2016), accessed 20/06/2020, https://bbccomplaints.com/2016/10/
[24]Kathleen Blee, "Evidence, Empathy and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan" in Perks & Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 424-433 there 425
[25] Blee, "Evidence, Empathy and Ethics", 425
[26] Alessandro Portelli "What Makes Oral History Different" in Perks & Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 48-58 there 51

Universally used standards, such as those used at the IISH: ISADG, EAD, MARC21,[27] to name a few, can be restrictive in the structure and presentation of the data. Changing these standards and accepting new formats could open the archive to different understandings of evidence and history. An example from the Digital Ethics and Reconciliation Report edited by St. Onge[28] illustrates how an archive can make efforts to do this. 'The Sq'éwlets People's Virtual Museum'[29] is built around traditional knowledge as told by oral tradition in partnership with the Canadian Museum of History.[30] The Sq'éwlets People are a Stó:lō – Coast Salish – community in the Fraser River Valley. Sqwelqwel (translated as "true news") is the oral testimony passed on by ancestors and is crucial to a Stó:lō understanding of life now: "our past is our future".[31] In efforts to accommodate this worldview, the use of their traditional language and Traditional Knowledge labels is an important facet of the virtual museum and is supported by the aurality and narrative included in the presentation of the collection alongside the record. The virtual viewer is built from a Stó:lō perspective, and the records are arranged in categories that represent a Stó:lō epistemology and cosmology.[32] The whole collection is built and organised around the needs of the people who are donating, creating and sharing the record, rather than the needs of the museum. The museum serves them and changes are made to the processes to accommodate and support the Sq'éwlets people. This focus on people first and foremost is something that has been central to the original oral history movement and which TLP has tried to replicate. Acknowledging differences and complexities of the communities "archivists are committed to documenting" is key to "achieving a more diverse archival record and membership".[33]

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[27] **ISAD(G)** (General International Standard Archival Description) as approved by the International Council of Archives; EAD (Encoded Archival Description) is a standardized system for encoding the descriptions of archival finding aids; MARC21 (Machine-readable cataloging for the 21st Century) standardized digital formats for cataloguing data.

[28] Karine St-Onge, "Digital Ethics and Reconciliation in Libraries and Archives", *University of Victoria Library Publications* (2019*):* 1-86.

[29] "The Sq'éwlets People's Virtual Museum" Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre / Stó:lō Nation, (2016), accessed 20/06/2020, http://digitalsqewlets.ca/index-eng.php

[30] St-Onge, "Digital Ethics and Reconciliation in Libraries and Archives.", 45

[31] "The Sq'éwlets People's Virtual Museum" Stó:lō Nation, accessed 20/06/2020, http://digitalsqewlets.ca/index-eng.php

[32] "The Sq'éwlets People's Virtual Museum" Stó:lō Nation

[33] Valerie Love and Marisol Ramos "Identity and Inclusion in the Archives: Challenges of Documenting one's own community" in Mary A. Caldera and Kathryn M. Neal. (Eds.), *Through the archival looking glass: A reader on diversity and inclusion*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2014), 1-22, there 15

Recognition is a key component to beginning to increase diversity at international archives. To first recognise that there is an issue and change is needed, to recognise the value in subjectivity as a core human component that can dismantle barriers to large faceless institutions and the value in subject testimony as part of a multi-narrative collection. Finally to recognise that there are many forms any formats of records that are valid and necessary to accommodate to include further narratives and voices in archives.

3.2 Representation

Greater representation is an integral part of increasing diversity in institutional archives. For Holly Gilbert, BL archivist for TLP, representation is of particular concern to GLAM institutions. In my interview with her she described knowledge institutions as having a responsibility to represent people, for her it is the reason why "you go to a library or an archive, or a museum; and if you don't see yourself, or someone like yourself... it's not a positive experience is it?".[34] There are, of course, many reasons to visit a library, archive or museum and, as stated, an archive does not need to house everything to be diverse, but within the scope of its collection mandate it has a responsibility to provide adequate representation. As such, from the point of view of the audience at the British Library that Holly is describing, there is an expectation of representation for any British person to 'see themselves' in the records at the library and their archival collections or exhibitions. How to integrate that representation into the institution's activities is another matter. TLP tries to do so by following the principles of the oral history movement with its approach to representation: anybody has the right to, and is best placed to, tell their own story.

TLP conversations are centred on the participants lived experiences that have shaped their knowledge and their own expertise. The project removes the interviewer, and although the producer remains, the intended outcome is to allow the participants to negotiate their own telling of their own (hi)stories. There are examples of archives applying this to their practices, creators and subjects of records are given the opportunity to contribute to the 'telling of their own

[34] Interview with Gilbert (London: 08/05/2019)

story'.[35] By collaborating with the communities and creators, these archives can better represent the records in varied and individual contexts. One such collaboration is the The Sq'éwlets People's Virtual Museum,[36] the museum was created by collaborating closely with a self-identified and formed community, and the community's knowledge and records are preserved and disseminated on their terms.

It is important for archivists to acknowledge that it may not be their place to decide how to preserve the records of underrepresented communities. Institutional archives can support the diversity of records either by collaborating and respecting communities' right to own and manage their own archives,[37] or by making a conscious choice to stop acquiring new materials from marginalised and Indigenous peoples and instead begin repatriation of records[38] entrusting the preservation with the record creators. Some communities or individuals still "see immense value in being represented in mainstream archives",[39] but others do not, and there is no less value in material housed outside of institutional archives. The only way to navigate the complexities of who belongs, who wants to be, and who should be in the archive is by working together with the creators of records to build relationships of trust through open dialogue and the recognition of different ways of archiving. Diversity is not about a greater volume of records but rather greater representation in archives of marginalised, oppressed or hidden groups in the larger historical landscape.

Another component of representation is access, if records are highlighted and disseminated on multiple platforms the chances of an audience being able to interact with them increases. Listening is key component of TLP, engaging with the record – both as it is being created and once it is shared – is a core technique designed to imbue interaction with the record with empathy. TLP uses its radio presence on BBC Radio 4 to disseminate its conversations to introduce a larger audience to more voices and viewpoints in the hope that some of its listeners, the majority of whom are part of a white, 55+, English audience, will learn something from

[35] Terry Baxter quoted in Helen Wong Smith, 'Introduction', *Journal of Western Archives 10*(1) (2019): 1-5, https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol10/iss1/1, 5
[36] "The Sq'éwlets People's Virtual Museum" Stó:lō Nation
[37] "The Sq'éwlets People's Virtual Museum" Stó:lō Nation
[38] St-Onge "Digital Ethics and Reconciliation in Libraries and Archives.", 46
[39] Mark Greene, "Into the deep end: one archivist's struggles with diversity, community, and collaboration and their implications for our profession" in Caldera & Neal (Eds.). *Through the archival looking glass,* 23-59, there 42

someone else's experiences and that the listeners not part of this majority have more opportunities to feel represented by whom they hear. In this way TLP aims to have social impact and to try to rectify underrepresentation, at least on Radio 4. Institutional archives can also use dissemination as a tool for representation, not only to increase access. Public radio and podcasts lend themselves particularly well to oral records, but can be employed also for written documents. An institutional archive has the power and resources to disseminate information, not only about its own records, but about those from other sources too. Large institutions, for example the UK National Archives, have dedicated podcasts with large listenership, currently their content is based solely on the collections housed at The National Archives,[40] while this can help in combatting hidden narratives in their collections, this platform could also be used to bring smaller community archives and private collections to The National Archive audiences. Using this method the institution increases the diversity of content available to its users, without having to 'own' it all.

Using alternative mediums to engage with audiences can also greatly increase the reach of an archive and potentially create different audiences that would not come into the reading rooms – either by choice or because of the many barriers they may face from geography to social distrust in institutions. Recently it was noticed at the IISH that the audience base, or visitors to the archive's reading room, is also changing. As well as the 'traditional' group of historical academics and researchers, a more interdisciplinary group of users are frequenting the reading rooms, an event was organised in particular for the crossover between artists and archives, hosted at the IISH by ARIAS.[41]

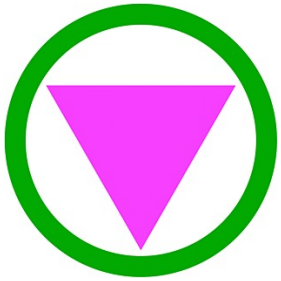
Records can represent narratives and alternative narratives, if institutional archives aim to increase diversity, a key component is to act upon a lack of representation in their collections. This form of representation does not intend to speak for or on behalf of someone, it is providing an opportunity for plural understandings of histories and knowledge production to allow for a multi-narrative approach to records and to increase the number of people that may see themselves and their experiences reflected in some way in the collections.

[40] "On The Record", The National Archives, accessed 20/06/2020, https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/category/on-the-record/
[41] "Who's afraid of the Archive" IISH October 4th, 2018, https://iisg.amsterdam/en/events/whos-afraid-archive

3.3 Providing

Within the framework of diversity studies, 'providing' is ensuring that there are spaces at the company that meet the needs of their many users.[42] The concept of 'space' is one that is brought up by the organisers and participants of TLP throughout the interviews. The physical space of the recording booth is designed and built to provide a sense of security and to protect the participants from the outside world. It is also a metaphorical "space for you and a loved one to have the conversation you always meant to have".[43] It is a "safe environment".[44] Designing 'safe spaces' in and around archives to empower and reassure their creators and users is not an easy task. As Victoria says, institutions can be intimidating and it is difficult to change that perception.[45]

The need to revisit trust in archival institutions and to build safe archival spaces is in part a consequence of a long history of failure to attend to the first two issues discussed here: recognition and representation. However, it is difficult to see how institutional archives that have a history of ignoring, silencing and marginalising narratives because of practices that reinforce a privileging of the status quo and the ideology of elite groups can be reimagined as 'safe spaces'.



Symbol for a Safe Space[46]

Alternative variant at a Columbus School[47]

[42] Vertovec, "Introduction", 3
[43] "The Listening Project: About." BBC Online, accessed 20/06/2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/41rDvmTW0T1JWjXkcvZtMqt/about
[44] Jo, Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews participants Linn, George and Jo. The Listening Project Live." *BBC Radio* (2015), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b069jd2p
[45] Interview with McArthur (Edinburgh: 26/04/2019)
[46] Heather Rosenfeld and Elsa Noterman, Roestone Collective, "Safe space: Towards a reconceptualization" *Antipode 46*(5), (2014): 1346-1365 there1348
[47] Alexis Moberger, "Columbus school strives to create "safe spaces" for LGBTQ students" *ABC News 6*, August 31st 2018, accessed 04/06/2020, https://abc6onyourside.com/news/local/columbus-school-strives-to-create-safe-spaces-for-lgbtq-students

To explore how the concept of a 'safe space' can be materialized and created into a real physical space, I turn to feminist theory and practices. The oral history movement often looked to feminist standpoint, for example in validating expertise from experience, and continues to do so,[48] it seems appropriate to use a similar interdisciplinary approach when answering this question. As a particular example of 'safe spaces' emerging from the women's movement of the late 20th century, public spaces began using a symbol of a pink triangle in a green circle to show visitors they were entering a 'safe space'. The idea behind it was to show support for marginalised folx and to let them know that they could feel 'safe' in these spaces.[49] Using the term folx specifically "signals to the reader that the writer means to include people of color, queer people, and other marginalized groups that tend to be excluded or ignored". [50] It is used to indicate that an authority, an educational institution or association does not tolerate violence, harassment or hate speech, thereby creating a safe place for marginalized people. It has been particularly used as a symbol for LGBTQ+ ally-ship and alternatives to the pink triangle can also be seen e.g. a rainbow triangle. These symbols can be seen in schools, businesses, community centers and shops. Assurances of safety in these spaces are problematic, but at least it shows that there a commitment to protecting marginalised groups from violence from those that intend to harm them and that those governing such spaces will defend them. Providing such a space also relies on those governing the space to have recognized that there is continuing violence and oppression of marginalised groups. In practice, there are aggressions between marginalised groups and within them too, these spaces are not to eliminate these confrontations, they are sites for negotiating difference and challenging oppression.[51] The users of the space should feel safe to voice their concerns and also be wary of their own privileges. To re-imagine a safe space in an institutional archive could be to change the current prevailing model of silence-only reading rooms. Allowing a space for study that also stimulates conversation rather than only enforcing silence, challenging the idea that archival space must always be monitored, policed and controlled. The architect of TLP road booth - Betty, Jacob Low,[52] argues that it is important to

[48] Blee, "Evidence, Empathy and Ethics", 424
[49] Roestone Collective, "Safe space", 1346
[50] "What does the term folx mean" *For Folx Sake,* September 8th 2019, accessed 28/06/2020 https://forfolxsake.com/what-does-the-term-folx-mean/
[51] "What does the term folx mean" *For Folx Sake,* September 8th 2019, accessed 28/06/2020 https://forfolxsake.com/what-does-the-term-folx-mean/
[52] Jacob Low, Burgess, M. "Fi Glover interviews Jacob Low, Rob Perks and Participants Rachel and Geoff: The Listening Project Live." *BBC Radio* (2015), accessed 29/04/2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z

create an environment that engages the users in conversation, and enriches discussion and in which they feel able to discuss whatever they want. This visually and conceptionally open institutional archive encourages critical feedback of its processes and roles, and users feel safe to discuss the issues surrounding archives within its walls.

According to Roestone Collective, an institution will never be completely 'safe', here they are using educational institutions as an example. They argue that the very institutionalization of a service creates power structures that marginalize folx and prioritise or favour others. An institutional archive falls into this dilemma. Nonetheless, the very effort to change, and to strive to create a safe(r) space in spite of their history of oppressive structures, is to make steps towards providing a space that encourages diversity. The first step may be to use a symbol or be explicit in the intention to create a safe space, but increasing diversity and being anti-discriminatory requires continued action and work, otherwise it is an empty gesture of performative ally-ship. By recognizing that no archive is free from the power structures that it is embedded in, a constructive dialogue can begin about how issues of privilege, power and difference play out in archives. To increase diversity even established institutional archives can provide spaces for people to openly discuss these issues and respond to them.[53] By providing such spaces and maintaining them, issues of diversity are continually being addressed[54] in a "constant movement between safe and unsafe, individual and collective, agreement and disagreement".[55]

TLP cyclically revisits its production methods to reassess and adapt to their participants' needs. Constructing a safe(r) space in an archive relies on a similar cycle of recognition of its provisions for its users. By being transparent about its limitations- recognizing it cannot always be a safe space for everyone – an institutional archive can work on "building trust between communities, repositories and archivists [which is] is essential" to diversity.[56] In this regard perhaps it is necessary to take a further step than that suggested by Vertovec's diversity model, and introduce the idea not only of 'providing' but in *sharing*.

[53] Roestone Collective, "Safe space", 1354-55
[54] Ibidem, 1348
[55] Ibidem,1355
[56] Ibidem

The idea of shared authority is one of OHA's oral history guidelines, and BBC Radio commissioner Tony Philips talks about the processes in TLP as "relinquishing some of that power and some of that authority and giving the space over to the participants".[57] Shared archives begin with building relationships with record creators creating a reciprocal archival process. There is a perception that archives, because they hold the power, are in the unique position to provide, invite, and dictate best how and what to archive. But increasing diversity means sharing power, information and resources. The record creators provide their stories, they invite the archivist to use their history, they know best how to archive their own history, including deciding who may be best place to be spokesperson and being aware of intersectionality and that communities are not monolith and that members may disagree with each other as well. "[E]ngaging communities to actively participate in archival practice will help remedy some of the historical lacunae that affect many underrepresented groups and empower them to take an active part"…. "rather than remaining a passive object of "preservation".[58]

To reiterate the example of The UK National Archive's podcast, by sharing their resources the institution could provide more shared spaces for learning and reciprocal information exchange. There is a lot of untapped experience that require funding and platforms, something bigger institutions have more of.

3.4 Summary of Recognition, Representation and Providing in Institutional Archives

Increasing diversity in archives is a complex issue. The elements of recognition, representation and providing and *sharing* contribute to a picture of institutional archives that try to challenge their own underlying hegemonic knowledge production and in so doing increase opportunities for diversity. Increasing diversity is about *action* rather than outcome, echoing the calls from social historian Howard Zinn for archivists to rebel against the very norms that the archives contribute to perpetuating.[59] The work of a rebel is never finished, and although work has been done before, as it was done by social historians and the oral history movement, the answers are

[57] Tony Philips, British Library "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.
[58] Love and Ramos "Identity and Inclusion in the Archives", 15
[59] Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives, and the public interest", 25

not finite, the goalposts have, rightfully, moved, there is more work to be done and more action needed. The oral history movement and TLP tried, and continue to try to achieve diversity through action by challenging conventional approaches to history, and by refusing to accept the status quo.

Increasing diversity requires action and continued introspection at the current practices that are not diverse enough. Recognising oppressive processes, building opportunities for representation, creating safe spaces, providing and sharing resources are all actions that must be continually reassessed and re-performed. Increasing diversity is not one task to be completed, it is lived, internalised and engrained in daily practices.

CONCLUSION: METHOD OVER FORMAT

The Listening Project encompasses the core foundations of the Oral History Movement in its processes. The first is its orality. While there are arguments about whether TLP can be strictly defined as an oral history project, it is undoubtedly oral. And yet, I believe that my analysis and application of TLP in archival processes shows that the format of the record is not the most valuable lesson that institutional archives can learn from the project.

My research set out to find which methods and aims of The Listening Project to understand whether they increased diversity and whether these could be used by institutional archives also looking to increase diversity. Ultimately, the core tenets of TLP were listening, intimacy in content and spaces, actively and subjectively participating in outreach and removing the interviewer. While engrained in orality- building a project around listening also illustrates how the project is centred around shared human experience, prioritising the people over the record, valuing personal lived experience. Creating custom built spaces to ensure the participants are comfortable and can feel safe in sharing these intimate experiences shows investment in the process and, again, the people involved. The absent interviewer does not mean an absent producer, in this way TLP is somewhere in between oral history projects and other archival material. It is more common for archival collections to arrive without any third-party involvement recorded in its materials, the creator(s) are the sole 'voices'. The archivist intervenes and selects, organises and process these materials via their own lens, but they do not interview the creator to gather their experiences. However the producer is involved from the pre-conception of TLP records. The producer's input is invaluable to the project and the collection is guided by their interest in increasing diversity in the records and outreach to underrepresented communities. It is TLP's approach to collecting many varied multi-narratives which then increases representation. It is in these actions that TLP make it more likely that someone would see or hear someone like them in the archive. TLP provides people a space to create their own records and supports them in this by sharing resources and knowledge, this is not dependent on the orality of the project. TLP is not important in applying diversity in international archives because of its format, but its methods.

The core elements of TLP are based in action, listening, creating, centring and outreach. These are actions that can be implemented in archival practices to increase diversity by focusing on what archivists *do* rather than the statistics of what is in, or who is coming to, the archive. The 'who' and 'what' is important, but change comes from doing something about it. Diversity comes from addressing what it is archivists and their institutions are (not) doing, and recognising that these processes need to be challenged. Change comes from within, and it comes from action.

Action, as argued in my research, can be condensed down to recognition, representation and providing. These are changes to institutional archival practices and a renewed theoretical approach to archiving. Recognition of past wrong doing and continuing failures is of primary importance when increasing diversity. Recognition is part of the archival context, just as context is vital to a record, so is the historical, political and social context vital to any action the archive tries to take towards diversity. It is also important to recognise that lack of diversity is a systemic issue and so it is not any easy fix – increasing diversity is not a performative one-time task. Diversity is a cyclical practice that needs constant attention and not be a ticked-box to appease "white guilt".[1]

Through recognition archivists also admit their own biases. Archivists' actions are laden with decisions and therefore bias. Hidden biases can be dangerous and unchecked create narrow collections that focus on narratives that reflect the archivist rather than representing the creators and the possible multi-narratives. However, learning from the oral history movement, continually attempting to counter subjectivity is unrealistic. Archives are not neutral. Recognising bias and subjectivity archivists can use their interests to enrich collections and further outreach causes. What needs to be clear however, is what actions were taken and why, this transparency helps the archival user to determine what effect the archivist may have had on the record. It holds the archivist accountable for their actions and does not attempt to hide the subjectivity of archival practices. This is something TLP also needs to address, rather than recognising the extent of the input from the producer and how this may affect the conversation and the archival collection, the organisers try to minimise the producers' role. Even if there has been no outreach or an archivist

[1] Sumaya Kassim, "The Museum will not be decolonized" *Media Diversified* (2017), accessed 20/06/2020, https://mediadiversified.org/2017/11/15/the-museum-will-not-be-decolonised/

is not be present for the creation of the record, their presence in the processes that determine what future users will see or hear cannot be understated.

When the archivist is not involved in the creation of the record, it is important that they collaborate with the people who were. TLP and the oral history movement are based on the belief that people are best placed to tell their own stories. This is not only true for the creation of the record's content, but also for the metadata, the context, the preservation and dissemination as exemplified by projects such as The Sq'éwlets People's Virtual Museum. Collaborating with the archival creator(s) allows them to be central in telling their own story, they can represent themselves. Expanding the means by which people can work with, and add to, the archive will increase representation. Diversity is enacted by creating multiple opportunities and access points to the archive so that anyone who wants to take part will know that they are welcome and will be respected and represented. It is in these actions that representation grows, without concentrating on quotas based on categorising people. Differences in people are complicated, intersectional and increasingly difficult to define without causing harm. So the key is to allow people to define themselves while recognising explicitly that differences exist and that marginalisation of these differences are prevalent in society and society's institutions.

Archives facilitate this representation by providing and sharing spaces and resources. To do so effectively is to remain conscious of the atmosphere in institutional archives, and how their design can create and perpetuate the status quo by restricting and policing spaces. Further action can to be taken to build safer spaces, not created, as TLP does, to hide or encourage users to forget their reality, but taking note of how spaces can allow people to feel more comfortable and accepted. These spaces encourage dialogue about what the archive is, could be and should be. This self-reflection, which historian and archivist Valerie Yow argued was important for oral historians,[2] can be applied to archival practices and help archivists at being better at what they do.

[2] Valerie Yow, ""Do I like Them Too Much?": Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa." *The Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (1997): 55-79. Quoted in Perks & Thomson, eds. *The oral history reader* (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2015): 7

Applying these techniques will not create a completely diverse institutional archive, but it is possible to increase diversity, and increase awareness in archival spaces about the current lack of diversity. These actions play a role in a wider landscape of social and historical diversity issues in archives, and pose further questions about an institutional archive's responsibilities in this landscape. The ever expanding 'nebula', to borrow from Smith's reading of the diversity debate,[3] reaches beyond the scope of this thesis, I have not addressed the issues in preserving unconventional materials, the practicalities of making these changes, diversifying the staff, combatting white supremacy and making explicitly anti-racist institutions, negotiating repatriation and reconciliation or decolonialisation. What I am arguing is that applying these methods, these *actions,* to institutional archival processes will increase diversity, by actively pursuing lasting change that will benefit their users and the archival landscape.

Ultimately, there were many useful lessons to be taken from TLP and the oral history movement that were applicable to international archives regardless of the format of the records in the collections. The oral format of TLP challenges a Western hierarchy model which continues to favour written records; the conversations give the participants' space to tell their own story; more people can take part in, and more people can understand, oral records. Nonetheless, the diversity of the project and the oral history movement is not defined by its format, but in recognising that there are multi-narratives, the value in personal truth and centring the one sharing that truth, and the value in alternative records. The diversity of oral history is in recognising the failures of conventional archives and the need to approach these issues using an alternative model, and TLP challenges the rigidity of conventional oral history projects. It is up to the archivists to create an archive that challenges how institutional archives currently manage daily practices and collection policies. It is the people in the institutions that create the archives "of the people, for the people and often even by the people",[4] it is the people in the institutions that can apply these methods, their *actions* that can increase diversity.

[3] Helen Wong Smith, "Diversity and Inclusion in Archiving" *Moving Image Archive News* (2018), accessed 24/06/2020, http://www.movingimagearchivenews.org/diversity-and-inclusion-in-archiving/
[4] Terry Cook, "What is past is prologue: a history of archival ideas since 1898, and the future paradigm shift", *Archivaria 43* (1997): 17-63, there 30.

APPENDIX: A List of Interviews

Interviews I conducted

Victoria McArthur interviewed at the BBC Scotland Office. Edinburgh, Scotland, 26/04/2019

Erik interviewed in Edinburgh, 06/05/2019

Holly Gilbert interviewed at The British Library. London, England, 08/05/2019

James interviewed in London, 10/05/2019

Interviews conducted by the BBC and The British Library

The Listening Project Workshop:

Rob Perks, Archivist at The British Library

Tony Philips, BBC commissioner for TLP

Linda Ingham, Visual artist and creator, also participated in a conversation.

Professor Joanna Bornat, Oral historian and reminiscence historian

Jonnie Robinson, British library staff member

BBC Radio Producers:

Linda Walker, BBC Radio Suffolk producer

Andrew Carter, BBC Radio Cumbria producer

Participants:

Kate; Gerry; Paula; Jo; unnamed participant

Accessible at the British Library, "The Listening Project Workshop" *British Library Sounds Archive.* (2015) Shelf mark C927/1446 C1-C4.

Interviews conducted by Fi Glover on BBC Radio 4:

Participants: Linn and George; and Jo

Accessible via, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b069jd2p [last accessed 29/04/2019]

Jacob Low, Listening Booth archictect

Rob Perks, British Library archivist

Participants: Rachel; Geoff

Accessible via, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b05xdc9z [last accessed 29/04/2019]

Producers:

Victoria McArthur, BBC Scotland

Rav Sanghera; BBC Sheffield

Simon Furber BBC Sussex

Steve Drayton, BBC Newcastle

Alice Williams, BBC Radio London

Lynne Rosser, BBC Wales

Accessible via, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b085t396 [last accessed 29/04/2019]

Susie Orbach, British psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, writer and social critic.

Accessible via, https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b08lk3jr [last accessed 14/06/2020]

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