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**The Medium of Testimony:
Testimony as Re-Presentation**

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ABSTRACT

A brief review of websites, publications and other literature produced by United Kingdom based ‘pro-refugee’ organizations will reveal that significant space is dedicated to biographical pieces about refugees and asylum seekers. Using language such as ‘testimony,’ ‘life stories,’ ‘voices,’ and ‘in their own words,’ these pieces often seek to counter the negative portrayal of refugees that appear in the U.K. media. This project seeks to investigate the manner in which pro-refugee organizations collect and use testimony and how this relates to their stated objectives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In her 1996 article, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,' Lisa Malkki takes issue with the way that refugees have traditionally been represented by those who are dedicated to helping them. For her, the dominance of visual representations renders refugees silenced, in need of some one to speak for them. Humanitarian organizations filled this role, assigning captions to photographs and providing 'expert testimony' about the conditions that refugees face (Malkki, 1996).

Perhaps in response to this and similar criticisms, refugee 'voices,' 'life stories' and 'testimony' have come to dominate current representations of the refugee published by 'pro-refugee'¹ organizations. Such depictions show a concern for the complexities of 'representation'; however, using testimony does not obviate the need to consciously consider the modes of production of these narratives. In a review of an Oxfam project, 'Listening to the Displaced,' Prem Rajaram suggests that even when the express purpose of a project is to 'listen' or to 'give voice':

...the institutional framework of the aid organization continues to set the boundaries within which refugee identity is voiced...[leading to] conceptions of refugees that are resistant to compound and detailed senses of social and political identity (Rajaram, 2002: 262).

Thus, representations continue to be mediated, depicting refugees' problems and needs over narratives that reveal the complexities of their lived experience.

In this study, we seek to understand the turn toward narrative representations of refugees' experience, as it has been implemented by pro-refugee organizations in the U.K. What is the logic behind the decisions to initiate these projects? What does the process look like? And to what ends are these testimonies used?

This study uses the term 'testimony' loosely to describe narrative accounts of life experiences, generally with attention to using a person's actual words. We have also included projects geared more towards self-expression, and which are not tied to narratives of the past. Consequently, we hope to determine what motivates an organization's or project's construction of testimony.

This study is exploratory in nature, and therefore does not have the ambition to provide a full explanation about this particular phenomenon. Our purpose is to generate new questions, ideas and hypotheses for future research. Because we are attempting to understand the meanings attached to testimony by those that use these kinds of representations, we have decided to use a qualitative approach that allows for a deeper exploration of motives and meaning.

¹ We use the term 'pro-refugee' organizations to encompass groups which consider themselves working for the benefit of asylum-seekers and refugees.

2. METHODOLOGY

Our research originated by identifying a list of organizations that published testimonies on their websites. From that list, each group-member emailed three organizations using a standard letter introducing our project (see Annex 1). Given the time constraints of the project, at the end of the contact phase we had arranged nine interviews, only seven of which we were able to conclude in the appointed time (see Annex 2).

Two people we interviewed did not directly work with pro-refugee organizations, however, they were involved with the publication of pro-refugee literature and exhibitions using testimonies. Thus we felt that their voices would contribute to the project.

We interviewed representatives from the following organizations:

- Amnesty International
- Asylum Aid
- Barbed Wire Britain
- PhotoVoice
- Refugee Council

And the following individual project directors:

- Nikki Van der Gaag
- Nushin Arbabzadah

Again given the time constraints and limitations on travel, we conducted interviews both in person and by phone. In both cases, we used a semi-structured interview process. The four group members worked together to create a flexible question schedule (see Annex 3) which could be modified given the specific conditions and focus of each interview. As a group, we felt that semi-structured interviews were ideal as the questioning is open-ended, encouraging free expression on the part of the interviewee, leading to a rich source of descriptive information (McQueen and Knussen, 2002: 36). Therefore, this method creates a space for dialogue between the researcher and the researched, conferring on the latter an active role in interview process.

Working with the question schedule and following the lead of the respondent the interviewer tried to cover three main areas of concern: 1) the respondent's background, 2) an overview of the project(s) involving testimony and 3) a discussion of the goals, process, experiences resulting from the project and feedback from participants. With regard to the first two areas we tended to direct the interview more firmly, seeking specific information, and with regard to the third, we attempted to construct more open-ended questions, allowing more opportunities for the respondent to answer as they saw fit (McQueen and Knussen, 2002: 100).

All but one of the interviews were conducted on a one to one basis in order to foster a personal connection between the interviewee and interviewer. In all cases, the researcher took notes during the discussion, attempting to write down exact quotes (paraphrasing when not

possible) in order to capture the essence of an interviewee's response. In two of the interviews, Asylum Aid and Barbed Wire Britain, a recording was made and a transcription of the interview produced. However, this process was abandoned for logistical reasons.

Even though many comparative studies between phone interviews and face-to-face interviews have found little difference in their validity (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996: 243), we found that phone interviews presented certain disadvantages. Telephone interviewing makes it difficult for interviewers to interpret the reactions of the respondent by observation (Newell, 1993: 98) and, as a result, misunderstandings may occur more frequently. Because there is no information about the respondent's environment, false interpretations of people's thoughts can occur more often. We noticed that when not face to face with the interviewer, interviewees became distracted and cut their answers short.

In addition, some respondents had a background in sociology or anthropology, and had previously worked on projects like ours. Others worked in public relations and were experienced in answering interview questions such as ours. As a result, we felt that they could anticipate how we were going to analyse their discourse and a lack of spontaneity was sometimes noticed. However, we attempted to counter these problems by asking follow up questions if we believed the interviewee was providing a 'pre-packaged' answer, by repeating back our impressions of the interviewees' answers at the end of the interview, and by allowing them to make corrections.

3. ETHICS

The project's choice of methods and analysis raise a number of ethical concerns. First, the use of semi-structured interviews to produce an academic report risks encouraging the researchers to impose their biases on the interviewees. Much has been written about the power differentials inherent in an interview setting. The interviewer naturally brings to a study a set of backgrounds and interests which both inform and skew the research agenda, questions asked, and framework within which data is interpreted (Caplan, 1988a; Wilson, 1992). A semi-structured interview may be particularly vulnerable to these pitfalls as it inherently allows the interviewer to refocus the discussion onto his or her areas of interests and empowers him or her to selectively record the elements of the conversations which resonate with the research programme (Kvale, 1996). These biases, it has been argued, are exacerbated when the questioners seek to uncover motivations or beliefs that the interviewee might be reluctant to express. Under these circumstances the researcher is prompted to hear the interviewee's answers cynically and look for alternative meanings within the responses (Wilson, 1992). Such distortions in the data collection process coincide, critical theorists explain, with pressure imposed on the researcher by his or her social and professional position. The academic structure of research asserts certain norms for what will be considered meaningful or important findings, promoting researchers to consciously or unconsciously manipulate their data to comply (Caplan, 1988b; Clifford, 1986).

This study originated from the concern that NGOs might be using refugee testimonies for their own policy or financial objectives without paying due consideration to the testifier's interests or emotional state. Moreover, it was conducted as part of a Research Methods course at the Refugee Studies Centre, within the University of Oxford, whose purpose is to train

students to participate in the form of independent critical analysis of the forced migration experience which the Centre undertakes. Consequently, it seems ideally constructed to lead the researchers to direct, hear and interpret the interviews in a manner that would indicate the NGOs are providing incomplete support for their testifiers. It is unclear, however, how such circumstances could be fully avoided as other anthropological methods, such as participant observation or structured interviews, have similar ethical difficulties. Likewise, within the project a number of precautions were developed, including, having all four researchers examine the notes from each interview so multiple perspectives could inform the analytical process and insuring that interviewees were available for follow-up questions if further information was needed to interpret a response. Nonetheless, it is an important ethical consideration, and an irony, that a project focused on the potential manipulation of life stories for an organization's particular benefit could similarly modify its data for its own ends.

Analogously, one must ask whether a project questioning and analysing advocacy might potentially undermine positive efforts, damaging the researched population. Kristen Hastrup and Peter Elsass (1990) have suggested anthropologists should have no role in political advocacy, except to present the most comprehensive and nuanced description of a population possible, providing a foundation to inform policy makers. They warn any other activities will inevitably lead researchers to sideline voices within a community, endorsing a homogeneity that runs directly against anthropology's focus on illuminating the diversity between and within communities. By potentially challenging the efficacy of NGOs' use of testimony this study may violate Hastrup and Elsass's principles. Our analysis may appear to promote certain procedures for collecting and displaying testimony, thus acting as a reprimand against those groups who fail to meet these standards. This is a particularly important concern as Sue Armstrong and Olivia Bennett (2002), in their study of the San, demonstrate that to empower migrant populations one must enable them to take pride in their society's history and culture. When outsiders attempt to reformulate indigenous representations they tend to overlook elements undermining the local efforts. This study is aimed at investigating the potential for NGOs to fall into this trap. However, if testimony-providers or informants had not previously experienced such negative effects from their involvement with testimony, our research could call into question a process they believed was valuable, reframing it as unethical or at least unsuccessful. We tried to limit this potential by obtaining informed consent from all participants, outlining for them the goals of the project before an interview was arranged, only contacting individuals who were responsible for overseeing testimony programmes (with the hope that they would already be engaged with these questions and concerns) and insuring that the findings were presented as potential implications, not absolute conclusions. Yet, once data and analysis is published, readers bring their own perspectives to the write-ups (Kvale, 1996; Clifford, 1986) making it unavoidable that some might find the results discouraging.

Finally, there are limits on the confidentiality available within the project. Typical anthropological guidelines demand that one preserve informants' confidentiality as fully as possible (Wilson, 1992). However, our research tried to uncover whether there is a connection between an organization's objectives and methods of collecting testimony and its stated agenda and structure. As a result it was necessary to disclose identifiable information about the organizations and projects studied. Our research attempted to address concerns about confidentiality by obtaining informed consent. In addition, we ensured that the individual informants were not named and their positions within the organization were not established. Nonetheless, there is a remaining concern that if asylum-seekers or future

employers read critiques of an organization's efforts they might be less likely to use the services of that group.

4. ANALYSIS

To formulate our findings, after the completion of the interviews, each researcher read the notes or transcriptions of all the interviews, and identified key sections of text, which were brought to the group. As a whole we identified general themes that emerged from our close readings—how the projects defined testimony, understood its purpose, determined its subject-content and went about the process of acquiring it. These themes were obviously shaped by the loose question schedule we developed for the interviews. With these themes in mind, we then reread the texts to look for additional sections related to the themes. To supplement our interviews, they were then read again in the context of the way each organization presented 'testimonies' in their websites, publications and other literature. What came out of this analysis is that the goals of an organization informed and limited the content presented in the testimonies and often determined the process by which the testimonies were collected and edited.

Given that the use of testimony has become common practice among organizations and individuals working for refugee interests, we began by investigating whether there was a consensus as to the meaning and purpose of this approach to representation. Though some of the organizations and individuals objected to our use of the term 'testimony' to describe their project, we found that the language used in each of the interviews was strikingly similar. There was an emphasis on their role in providing 'space' (interview with PhotoVoice), 'giving voice' (interviews with Van der Gaag, PhotoVoice, Amnesty International), 'speaking' (interview with British Refugee Council) and 'telling' (interview with Asylum Aid). This focus on voice suggests that the organizations are concerned with issues of representation, and are seeking to combat the 'bureaucratization of knowledge about refugees' (Rajaram, 2002: 248), where the opinions of experts are privileged over the lived experience of the refugees themselves (Malkki, 1996).

However, as Rajaram (2002) points out, it is important to recognize the ways that the goals and interests of the organization or individual frame the limits of these representations. The attempts to 'give voice to the voiceless' can actually be disempowering as representations are often dependent on the group's specific agenda. Thus, we attempted to read the interests of the organizations we examined into the testimonial representations of refugees.

The projects we studied had diverse goals related to their use of refugee testimony. We found that the goals of the testimony projects fell along a continuum, as described below:

evidence for policy change-----changing public opinion-----self-expression/capacity building

While each of the projects had overlapping and differing agendas, we placed them on the continuum based on how they defined their primary objectives. Amnesty International, the British Refugee Council and Asylum Aid fell along the left side of the spectrum, PhotoVoice, Van der Gaag fell on the right and Arbabzadah and Barbed Wire Britain fell between these two. Though we found that each project shared similar conceptions of testimony, their goals largely determined the way that testimony was presented in their

publications, literature and on their websites, as well as the content of testimony and the process by which it was produced.

The larger organizations—Amnesty International, the British Refugee Council and Asylum Aid—used refugee testimony in documents aimed at changing policy. In these publications, testimony lends legitimacy to claims made on behalf of refugees (Websites of Amnesty International, the British Refugee Council and Asylum Aid). Often testimony appears summarized or abbreviated and accompanied by one or a few direct quotes chosen for their impact. Refugee testimony, for these organizations, represents a body of facts that can be drawn upon to convince and involve lawmakers, the public, or their members to act on policy issues related to refugees:

I think it is important to set out the fact and it is the fact which would serve as the force for making the international community [aware]...it is important to remember that Amnesty International is a membership organization, when it comes to getting our members to work on a specific issues, the facts are essential but also the emotional elements of the story [are essential] for encouraging public activism. (interview with Amnesty International)

Refugee Council's interview mentioned that particularly well spoken or effective pieces of refugee testimony were 'recycled' to support a variety of policy points. For these organizations, their primary goal is to change policy and practices of governments, and through the use of testimony their appeals gain legitimacy and evoke empathy. As such, the types of experience related in these representations tended to focus on problems and needs.

Our informant from Asylum Aid mentioned:

The project was about trying to identify the problems that women in detention encountered through their own experiences... The idea was to highlight these problems with their own voices. (interview with Asylum Aid)

Similarly the representative for Amnesty International stated:

Testimony for Amnesty International is the source of information. Our sort of primary sources of information is testimony by individuals affected (interview with Amnesty International)

The Refugee Council explained that on occasion when they are writing a report they approach a category of people defined by a particular problem or issue, and solicit testimony from them only on that topic (Interview with British Refugee Council). This approach echoes the one outlined by Rajaram (2002: 257) where "[s]peaking" means outlining material needs,' as they are defined by the implementing agencies or organizations.

As this suggests, a project's objective determines not only form and content, but also the process through which these organizations obtain and produce 'testimony.' For the larger organizations, it seems that structural imperatives impact greatly on the process. For each, those that collect the testimonies—case workers, country field officers—are not always the same people as those that produce the materials containing that testimony. Thus, the process appears extractive, and there is little support for those who participate (interviews with Amnesty International; British Refugee Council). When the organizations had considered the need for additional support, they concluded that their pre-existing service structure would

satisfy the testimony-provider's needs (interviews with British Refugee Council; Asylum Aid).

After these organizations gather testimony, the role of the testimony-provider is minimal. These organizations maintain editorial control, and tend not to go back and seek approval of the final products.

We did not send back the transcription to them to check them... You should not really recheck it, inevitably they say I didn't want to say that (interview with Asylum Aid)

This quote suggests that, for Asylum Aid, continued engagement with the testimony providers represents a challenge, potentially rendering useless important data sources supporting their objectives.² The Refugee Council representative was also quite frank about the instrumental way that testimonies are treated within the organization:

To convert that [what we are given] into usable testimony is the hardest thing in the world (interview with Refugee Council).

None of these organizations had a process for individuals to request the removal of their testimony from publications, or websites.

As we have shown Amnesty International's, Asylum Aid's, and the British Refugee Council's objective of informing and guiding policy leads them to use testimony in an instrumental way. This view determines both the content of testimonies and the process by which they are collected, edited and published. Though they may use language suggesting that refugees are speaking for themselves, the organizations largely retain control over the representations of refugee experience that emerge in their publications.

At the other end of the spectrum, two of the projects—PhotoVoice's *Moving Lives* and *Transparency* projects and Van der Gaag's *Picturing Oxford; Our Clothes, Our City; Our Journeys* and *Book of Testimonies* projects—stated their goals in terms that were participant centred. Objectives here are closely linked to process; they are to promote self-expression, empowerment, capacity building and through this build bridges between the refugees and the rest of British society. On its website, PhotoVoice articulates a number of interrelated objectives of its project(s):

[we want to]...give voice to those who are too often ignored or silenced, provide a unique means for expression and creativity, encourage participants to gain confidence in their capabilities and their role in civil society, enable participants to become advocates for change (Website of PhotoVoice).

Van der Gaag explains her project:

[the project works]...with them [young refugees and asylum seekers] individually in terms of how they would like to take the project, giving people who don't have very much control in

² Though Asylum Aid recognized that with additional time or resources it would be advisable to provide an opportunity for refugees and asylum-seekers to approve the organization's use of their stories (as they are a vulnerable group), its representative made it clear that giving over editorial control was part of the consent process. She also emphasized that currently the organization often remains in continued contact with its testimony-providers through its other programmes.

their lives...we're trying to give back to young people, carving out a small space that is theirs. (interview with Van der Gaag).

Because the goal of these projects is empowerment, they give control over content to the participants. It is the participants who develop a focus for the project; the role of the organization is merely to assist participants through explorations of various methods and techniques for creating representations. Participants have chosen topics that reflect their interests and perspectives, including among others: fashion and identity, and the symbolic importance of hair. Though participants' experiences of being 'refugees' inform the images and stories presented, it is seen as just one (among many) defining features of their identity.

Likewise, the process reflects a dedication to working with participants to produce something that is truly theirs. This involves continuously checking-in with participants, a process often articulated in contrast to the way that media representations are generated. Van der Gaag says:

...you are checking back with them all the time. It is not like it just gets sent off to print (interview with Van der Gaag).

and later:

whenever you are working with someone's life or someone else's story you have to be very careful. If you give an interview to a journalist you can't be sure what will come out (interview with Van der Gaag).

Both projects attribute authorship to the participants, thus the participants make the ultimate decisions about how their stories are represented.

For these two projects, the reflective process of producing representations is a goal in-and-of-itself. This kind of dialogic approach means that participants retain control and shape the project from initiation to end. What emerge from the process are complex representations of these refugees as young people with diverse concerns and pre-occupations.

The remaining projects—Barbed Wire Britain's *Voices from Detention* and *Notes From a Big World* by Arbabzadah—fall between these poles.

The primary goal of Barbed Wire Britain's testimony project is to change public opinion and spur individuals to become involved in the campaign to stop the detention of asylum seekers. Though this project shares some of the characteristics of the policy oriented projects in terms of the way that it treated content, the process by which testimony was gathered was much more collaborative.

The scope of the testimonies published in *Voices from Detention* is limited to the experiences of detention. The project seeks to highlight the injustice of detention, through the use of personal narrative. For our respondent, the personal nature of testimony allows the reader to identify with the individual telling the story, and it is this kind of identification that spurs people to become involved:

When it comes down to it people are pretty unsophisticated and respond best when we can feel and see and it is not just some terrible thing, it is something that hits home, it could be me (interview with Barbed Wire Britain).

Yet, despite this statement, accounts of maltreatment and suffering were privileged over personalizing information. However, because of the collaborative nature of the project, it is unclear whether the limited content of the testimonies was an editorial decision, or if participants did not wish to include this kind of information.

Barbed Wire Britain was very conscious of the way that journalists, other organizations and even academics have used and misused testimony. Thus, the role of the editors was intentionally minimal, primarily limited to corrections of grammar.³ When changes were necessary, the editors attempted to maintain the tone, and use the exact words wherever possible, going back to check with the participants until all were satisfied:

Before we published it...we went back to them and asked them 'this is what it is going to look like, are you happy with it, are you happy with the words' (interview with Barbed Wire Britain).

As this quote shows, there was an acute sensitivity to the authorship of the participants, and commitment to real collaboration.

Like Barbed Wire Britain, Arbabzadah was motivated to collect the stories of refugees based on a desire to combat the negative images of refugees in the British Press.

Most people do not meet refugees, [they] only hear about them or read about them in journals and newspapers...[the book is a way of] letting these two worlds meet (interview with Arbabzadah).

As a refugee, she was sensitive to the way that 'refugees are often talked about' (interview with Arbabzadah) and saw the book as a way to allow them to speak for themselves.

With that in mind, content was limited only by a broad theme—'What does it mean to be British?'—and collaborators were welcome to choose any genre of writing in their response. As Arbabzadah put it:

I did not want to impose a form. (laughs) So much is imposed on refugees already that I did not want to add to it (interview with Arbabzadah).

This approach allowed room for a diversity of representational styles that, for Arbabzadah, echoed the diversity of the refugee community.

However, unlike the PhotoVoice projects and Van der Gaag's projects, Arbabzadah played the role of an editor. While she kept editing to a minimum in the works that were published, she did not publish all of the submissions. She chose those that would appeal to and challenge British readers' conceptions of refugees—coherent, not clichéd, not too angry—and intentionally included as much diversity as possible in terms of age, country of origin, style and gender. In this manner, she designs the book around her focus, and doubtless the picture that emerges will reflect her concerns.⁴

³ One of the testimonies was recorded and then transcribed, and cleaned up before publishing—thus requiring greater editorial intervention.

⁴ We were not able to see a copy of the book, *Notes From a Big World*, as it was pending publication.

For both Barbed Wire Britain and Arbabzadah the stories told by refugees hold the key to changing public opinion, and each attempted to remain faithful to the words and voices of those that contributed, while exercising some degree of control over both content and process. Though the projects were collaborative, it could be said that authorship but not ownership was offered to the participants.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This project examined the methods used by pro-refugee projects for acquiring and displaying testimony, the motivations behind its use and the goals that testimony may serve. The information collected during the study reveals the significant ways that the structure and agenda of a project may impact how testimony is collected and presented. The more policy-oriented projects tended to exert editorial control over the testimony process, using the refugees' words to illustrate a particular point about the refugee experience, but failing to emphasize the personal and individualized nature of a life story. Projects that sought to empower refugees through self-expression engaged in a collaborative process with the refugees, letting them maintain control over their testimonies. This resulted in representation that demonstrated the testimony-provider was a whole person whose life was not circumscribed by 'being a refugee.' We think that it is important that the testimony process be opened up for consideration and debate within such projects. While we are not attempting to privilege one form or use of testimony, we believe there needs to be a consciousness of how the advocacy goals of a project affect the experience of testimony providers and the representations which result.

However, such a recommendation underscores the limitations of our study. Critically our study is missing the perspective of refugees, both those who have given testimony and those who may encounter it. Due to limited time, resources, and additional ethical considerations, we decided that we should focus our study on project staff exclusively. Yet, without the refugees' perspective, paradoxically, we, too, run the risk of 'speaking for refugees' and portraying the refugee experience as homogeneous. In addition, the criticism we raise on their behalf regarding the potential negative implications of certain testimony-gathering procedures, may be unfounded. This is especially of concern as our research did not uncover any accounts of complaints or criticism regarding the process or content of testimony. Moreover, even if we accept that it is appropriate for us to speak for refugees, we need to remember that the projects examined within this study are all attempting to work on refugees' behalf. As discussed in the ethics section above, we should be wary of challenging advocacy efforts with potentially positive effects on refugees' lives.

Similarly, given our limited sample size, it is unlikely that the typology we created is generalizable. Nonetheless, as the study was conceived of as an exploratory investigation, our findings do suggest that additional research would be merited. We feel given our data it would be meaningful to investigate whether and how testimony affects public opinion and the financial incentives behind the organizational use of testimony. As mentioned above, a project which incorporated the opinions and experiences of refugees could expand on the analysis presented in this paper.

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ANNEX 1: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

The persons interviewed were first contacted by e-mail. Each of us used this letter template introducing our research project to approach three organizations. We adapted the letter to suit the nature of the testimony project of each organization, and the role of the contact person within the organization.

Standard letter:

Dear (fill in name),

My name is (fill in your name). I am a student with the Refugee studies Centre at Oxford. I am working with a team of three people on a project investigating the use of refugee testimony by Non-Governmental Organizations. After exploring (fill in organization) website I noticed that you employ testimony in your advocacy efforts. Thus I was hoping to speak with someone from your organization that has been involved in either the production or use of testimonies. Ideally, myself, or someone from my team, would hope to arrange an approximately one-hour in person interview sometime between mid-January and mid-February. However, we recognize that because of busy schedules a telephone interview or another time frame might be more convenient and we are certainly able and willing to work around your schedules. (The following sentence may need to be modified depending on contact) If you are not the correct person to contact about this please feel free to forward this message to whomever you believe most appropriate.

Please let me know if you have any questions or suggestion regarding our project and thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Your name)

ANNEX 2: ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILES

Barbed Wire Britain:

Type: 'Campaign' completely voluntary, loosely organized, local/national
Project content: Experiences of detention.
Project goal: To humanize detainees, draw attention to 'injustice,' move people to act.
Type of testimony: Self-edited.
Mode of publication: Website and pamphlet.
Website: <http://www.barbedwirebritain.org.uk/>

Photo Voice:

Type: Youth/community arts project (international, but local projects). We focused on the Moving Lives and Transparency projects in east London.
Project Content: Digital story telling—workshops to teach youth photographic and story telling skills.
Project Goal: Bridge building (youth from London, and refugees), skills/capacity building.
Type of testimony: Photo/digital stories accompanied by voice over, or text/captions, also short bios of youth on website.
Mode of Publication: Website, DVD, exhibition.
Website: <http://www.photovoice.org/>

Nikki Van der Gaag:

Type: Youth/community arts project, and book. Current exhibition: Local Stories.
Project content: A collection of self-representations of refugees/asylum seekers.
Project goal: Bridge building (youth from Oxford and Oxford public), skills/capacity building.
Type of testimony: Photo and accompanying life stories.
Mode of publication: Book, exhibition at local modern art museum.

Nushin Arbabzadah:

Type: Edited collection of writing on 'What does it mean to be British?'
Project content: Book, a collection of self-representations of refugees/asylum seekers. Not testimonies, rather creative expression.
Project goal: To allow people to speak for themselves.
Type of testimony: Self submitted, diverse, mildly edited (for grammar) and content selected by Nushin Arbabzadah.
Mode of publication: 175 page book with introduction by Nushin Arbabzadah.

Amnesty International (AI):

Type: International, human rights advocacy, lobbying.
Project content: Not a project with refugees, per se.
Project goal: AI collects testimonies about human rights violations and uses them as a source of information for advocacy.
Type of testimony: Not all of them are edited. Those which get published are highly edited.
Mode of publication: Website, reports.
Website: <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/>

Asylum Aid:

Type: Provides legal aid, also policy work and campaigns. They have special project for refugee women. (National, UK).
Project content: They Took Me Away, a project about women's experiences of immigration detention in the UK.
Project goal: Provide support for policy document regarding the detention of women asylum seekers, using their own words.
Type of testimony: Well edited/summarized stories between 200-500 words.
Mode of publication: Website, advocacy papers, annual report and other donor oriented publications.
Website: <http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/>

Refugee Council:

Type: Large organization involved in advocacy, lobbying, direct services, legal, and advice to other organizations or agencies dealing with refugees, pre-packaged educational units for teachers. (National, UK)

Project content: Not a project, per se, but use snippets of refugees' stories in their magazine *Exile* (no longer published), educational units for teachers, as well as in annual report and other donor oriented media.

Project goal: Opaque

Type of testimony: Highly edited snippets of people's stories, followed by a quote about how great the Refugee Council is. Usually no more than 50-150 word in total.

Mode of publication: Websites, annual report, magazine, educational materials

Website: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

The following organizations were contacted but we did not manage to get interviews in time to include them in our research project:

Refugee Aid:

Type: Provide legal advice for newly arrived asylum seekers and promote the development of refugee communities. (National, UK)

Project content: Not a project, per se, but use refugees' stories on their website, in a project called Refugee Voices.

Project goal: Opaque.

Type of testimony: Well edited/ summarized stories between 200-500 words.

Mode of publication: Websites, annual report.

Website: <http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/>

Regional Refugee Forum:

Type: Umbrella organization for 31 refugee-led community organizations throughout the North East of UK. Member organizations include communities from South America, Africa, Eastern Europe, South East Asia, and the Middle East.

Project content: Not a project, per se, but use refugees' stories on their website and in newsletters. Generally they focus on life in the UK but also on refugee community organizations' activities relating to their country of origin.

Project goal: To create a space where refugees can talk for themselves.

Type of testimony: Well edited but this process is done by refugees.

Mode of publication: Websites, annual report.

Website: <http://www.refugeevoices.org.uk/>

ANNEX 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTION SCHEDULE

About the Interviewee

1. What is your position in the organization?
2. Have you held other positions in the organization?
3. How long have you worked with the organization?
4. Have you worked for other organizations similar to this one?
5. Are you a volunteer?

About the Organization

1. What are the goals of the organization, what is its mission?
2. What kind of organization? i.e.
 - Structure: do you have paid staff? How many?
 - network: organization involved in direct service, support, advocacy?
 - local, regional, national, international in scope?

What we're about— After exploring the Web we realized there a large number of organizations were utilizing testimonies, refugee life stories or artistic representation of the refugee experience in their advocacy efforts. Thus, we are hoping to explore testimonies as a genre, i.e. the process in which they are acquired and recorded. In addition, we are interested in why organizations have decided to devote their resources to these projects.

Use of Testimony

1. Your organization uses testimony.. please describe the project(s)? We noticed your website calls testimonies x, how did you arrive at this label? What does it mean for you and your organization?
2. Were you involved with the initiation and/or execution of the project? If so please describe involvement. If not, please describe your contact with people who have conducted the project.
3. Why did the organization decide to initiate this project? (When? Why then?)
4. How do refugees get to know your organization and what routes might they have taken to get involved with this programme?
5. What is the process by which testimonies are given/taken? (Who writes the questions? How are testimonies recorded? What language is it conducted in? How?)
 - how do you deal with issues of privacy, anonymity? (change names, etc.)
Is there an 'informed consent' process? (Do you deal with minors, how is this handled?) Are refugees allowed to edit or review their testimonies/representations after they are given? Are they allowed to preview publications?
 - What kind of feed-back have you gotten from those who have given testimonies?
 - do you provide follow up support for those that provide testimonies?
 - is there a mechanism for people to ask for their testimony to be removed from websites, or other publications?
6. How do you decide which representations to publish?
 - a. Have those who have had their testimonies published expressed different reactions from others?

7. What is the role of collection/publication of testimony in furthering the stated objectives of the organization?
 - potential follow up questions:
 - if they say that testimony benefits the refugee directly—
 - in what way?
 - if it is to change public opinion
 - How do they see that happening?
 - Are life stories more or less convincing than other types of ‘consciousness raising’ efforts?
 - include a question about whether they (think they) receive more donations, or outside funding as a result of the use of testimony. Perhaps: does the change in public perceptions of refugees translate into more support (financially) for your organization, or for other organizations working with refugees?
8. Talk about emotion. Is there a desire to elicit an emotional response from the viewer/reader? Why? What is the benefit? Do you perceive or have you experienced any negatives from this?

Effect on those who give their Testimony

1. How does the publication of testimony affect the refugees/asylum seekers that provide the testimony?
2. What effect if any does the publication of these stories have on other refugees/asylum seekers?
 - a. How do you address the possibility of ‘culture clashes’ where refugees come from backgrounds where it is either abnormal or inappropriate to share experiences in this manner? Do you think these kinds of cultural differences affect refugees’ relationship with the organization in any manner?
3. Has any participant expressed any negative feelings about the process?
 - If yes: could you explain, how did the organization respond?
 - Likewise, has any participant expressed positive feelings after going through the process?

Is there anything you think we should have discussed which we haven’t gotten to? Is there anything you would like to add?

Follow-up

Would it be possible to contact one or more of the participants in your project for an interview about their experiences with your organization?