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# Conversation with an Interpreter: Considerations for Cross-Language, Cross-Cultural Peacebuilding Research

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# Conversation with an Interpreter: Considerations for Cross-Language, Cross-Cultural Peacebuilding Research

## Abstract

The ongoing processes of peacebuilding involve dialogue (Lederach 1997) and co-discovery (Freire 1970), which can sometimes be facilitated through academy-initiated research. Qualitative research provides opportunities to move from a positivist approach to a more equal, participatory, interactive exploration that benefits all participants, including the researcher in a “co-production of knowledge” (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach 2009 p. 279). Cross-cultural, cross-language research (where researchers and participants do not share the same language), with all its riches, brings particular challenges for all involved. Beyond the issues of power and perceived power in any kind of research (Sprague 2005), in cross-cultural and cross-language research, already complex interactions are both facilitated/navigated and multiplied with the addition of an interpreter (Wallin and Ahlstrom 2006) who becomes the conduit for all interactions. This article focuses on the experiences of a cross-language interpreter involved in a participatory action study in peacebuilding in her home country of Ukraine. Her insights on the role of the interpreter, and considerations for future studies are shared through a conversation with the primary/initial inquirer at the end of this qualitative mixed-method project.

## Author Bio(s)

Maureen Flaherty is an assistant professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at University of Manitoba, Canada. Sonya Stavkova is an instructor at the Lviv Polytechnic University in the Department of Sociology and Social Work. She is also a professional interpreter for English/Ukrainian language and is also fluent in Russian. The authors worked together from 2001-2004 on a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded project, Reforming Social Services: Canada-Ukraine during which they helped establish a new Faculty of Social Work and numerous social services in Lviv, Ukraine. Since, they have conducted workshops for service providers in Ukraine and more recently worked together on a participatory study using narrative and visioning as peacebuilding tools across diverse regions in Ukraine. They hope that their reflections on their work together may assist in furthering peacebuilding cross-language/cross-cultural work. Email: Maureen.Flaherty@ad.umanitoba.ca (Maureen Flaherty) and vstavkovy@ukr.net (Sonya Stavkova)

**Conversation with an Interpreter:  
Considerations for Cross-Language, Cross-Cultural Peacebuilding Research**

**Maureen P. Flaherty and Sonya Stavkova**

**Abstract**

*The ongoing processes of peacebuilding involve dialogue (Lederach 1997) and co-discovery (Freire 1970), which can sometimes be facilitated through academy-initiated research. Qualitative research provides opportunities to move from a positivist approach to a more equal, participatory, interactive exploration that benefits all participants, including the researcher in a “co-production of knowledge” (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach 2009 p. 279). Cross-cultural, cross-language research (where researchers and participants do not share the same language), with all its riches, brings particular challenges for all involved. Beyond the issues of power and perceived power in any kind of research (Sprague 2005), in cross-cultural and cross-language research, already complex interactions are both facilitated/navigated and multiplied with the addition of an interpreter (Wallin and Ahlstrom 2006) who becomes the conduit for all interactions. This article focuses on the experiences of a cross-language interpreter involved in a participatory action study in peacebuilding in her home country of Ukraine. Her insights on the role of the interpreter, and considerations for future studies are shared through a conversation with the primary/initial inquirer at the end of this qualitative mixed-method project.*

Rather than a state, peace is defined as an ongoing activity of cultivating agreements. People participating in this reality of peace act as cooperative participants seeking solutions... (Kelly, C., Eblen, K. 2002, 2)

Peaceful living involves continual individual and community development. As such, the continual processes of peacebuilding require ongoing dialogue (Lederach 1997), co-discovery, and empowerment (Freire 1970). In turn, formal research, which is often initiated by the academy, can play a facilitative role in this discovery.

Qualitative research, using a variety of methodologies, provides opportunities to move from a positivist approach to a more equal, participatory, interactive exploration that benefits all participants, including the researcher in a “co-production of knowledge” (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach 2009, 279). Participatory action research (PAR), which can involve qualitative and quantitative methodologies, has the unique possibility to engage individuals and/or community members in collective reflection/action leading to positive growth and change for all involved (McIntyre 2008). Particularly for people who have lived under oppression or other colonization, PAR becomes an act of co-investigation (Freire 1970) through which people can re-discover and “re-right” their own history.

Narrative as a research methodology, particularly personal narrative, can further the possibilities for participant empowerment; especially for those who have been marginalized or oppressed, the act of voicing their story in itself can be a transformative experience (Chase 2005). And so, narration as a research tool also becomes a kind of action research. The participant/narrator is part of her own audience and with her internal dialogue to facilitate the process, sharing a previously silenced story with another bearing witness can become a pivotal interaction (Chase 2005; Flaherty 2012). Hearing the story also creates new possibilities for the listener who is able to take another’s perspective. “Stories simultaneously engage mind and heart” (Senehi 2002, 52). Peacebuilding – healing any kind of trauma or conflict – requires the healing of emotion and intellect (Flaherty 2012; Herman 1992/1997;

Senehi 2002) and in this way, storytelling has become a way of addressing historical trauma and has been key in the foundation of truth commissions.

Research using narrative as a tool may offer the gift of adding stories into history — counter-narratives to those previously told. In this practice, stories collected informally or formally, as in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, may become part of collective stories that again give voice to those previously marginalized. The act also changes history. As a respectful inquirer, the researcher who receives and shares stories reflexively assists the teller to explore her own story wherein she may connect with personal values and strengths (Flaherty 2012). These processes open possibilities for empowerment, transformation, and peacebuilding within and across cultural groups (Cruikshank, 2000; Lederach 1997; Potts & Brown 2005; Senehi, 2008; Smith 2006/1999, 117).

Another age-old process – visioning for the future – can also be used in bridge-building, and as a participatory action tool, has been written about most frequently in the last two decades (see, for example, Lederach 1997). In essence, visioning can be the act of parties working together to co-create a picture or story for, hopefully, a common future. This work is being explored for its merits working across divided societies – in essence, cross-culturally (Flaherty 2012).

Still, cross-cultural, and especially cross-language research brings its own challenges for all involved. Beyond the issues of power and perceived power in any kind of research (Sprague 2005), in cross-cultural and cross-language research (where researcher and participants do not speak the same language) these challenges of already complex interactions are both facilitated/navigated and multiplied with the addition of an interpreter (Wallin and Ahlstrom 2006). In cross-language research the interpreter becomes the conduit for all interaction. Temple (2008) explored some of the challenges in determining which interpreters to use; other researchers have looked at different ways to involve interpreters in face-to-face

interviews (Williamson, et al. 2011) and advantages of consulting interpreters on cross-cultural communication (Hudelson 2005). Until recently, however, little research has reported on the impact on the interpreter involved in research work as a co-participant and in reality co-researcher, although this is shifting with writers such as Splevins, Cohen, Joseph, Murray, and Bowley (2010). This is of particular importance if we acknowledge the impact one individual can have on the workings and well-being of a community.

This article focuses on the impact on the interpreter of doing cross-cultural, cross-language participatory action research using narrative as a tool of inquiry. Interpreter/co-author, Sonya Stavkova, shares her insights in a conversation with this article's co-author/practitioner Maureen Flaherty at the end of a research project using narrative and visioning as community-building tools with women in a struggling Ukraine. The conversation addresses the role of the interpreter and the implications for her in this kind of research and community building, and offers considerations for others interested in doing similar work. We have elected to use the term primary/initial inquirer with the understanding that while researchers may initiate a study, in collaborative research, from feminist perspectives (Sprague 2005) and Indigenous perspectives (see Smith 2006; 1999 for example), the other participants are co-inquirers. We have also chosen to use the feminine pronoun, "she" when referring to interpreters—first, because the interpreter in this case is female, and second, for ease of reference, acknowledging that interpreters may be of any gender.

We begin by introducing the context of our conversation shared as the focus of this article—the process of conducting a participatory action research study with eighteen women in two diverse areas of Ukraine. Following the brief look at setting for the background study and the conversation included here, we explore some common understandings about roles and expectations of cross-cultural, cross-language interpreters in research. We note that while it is common in feminist scholarship particularly to make explicit the role and impact of the

primary inquirer, there appears to be little known about the impact of research on the interpreter in cross-language, cross-cultural research. In this section of our paper, Sonya expresses her experience of much more than she anticipated as a result of her role of interpreter in this study—and she shares some of her insights to assist future researchers. Our final section summarizes our thoughts about the implications and considerations for undertaking cross-language research with an interpreter, particularly when narrative and visioning are the methodologies of choice.

### **The Setting**

The winter of 2010 was one of the coldest in a decade for Ukraine. In that frosty time, we began our interview process with eighteen women in two diverse areas in Ukraine. We were studying peacebuilding – looking into the possibilities for personal narrative and group visioning as bridgebuilding tools in a country propelled into Independence in 1991, but still deeply divided in a largely east-west split. This split seemed due to numerous factors including history, culture, demography and ideology differentially wrought through centuries of regionally different occupational regimes (Flaherty 2012; Marples 2007).

Our study began in January 2010, in Lviv, Ukraine, just after the first run of the fifth presidential election (Kyiv Post 2010, Kuzio 2010). The incumbent president, Viktor Yuschenko, had been wiped off the ballot. Yuschenko, the face of the Orange Revolution and a man upon whom many hopes had been placed by independent minded Ukrainian nationalists, had disappointed in his inability to control an unruly parliament and bring the economy out of its deep hole. The two main contenders left on the ballot were Yulia Tymoshenko and Viktor Yanukovich; many voices on Western Ukrainian streets said there was no point in voting at all. Others, more comfortable with a pro-Russian government, spoke about the security of the old days and a belief that anything would be better than Yuschenko's pro-European Union bent. Yanukovich was their man. Yulia Tymoshenko had

been a running mate and supporter of Yuschenko, but once he took the presidential seat, she had openly defied him and turned away from their relationship.

### **The Project: Peacebuilding with Women in Ukraine**

During the days between the first and second run of the fifth Ukrainian presidential election, the mood in the West was pessimistic and the energy was low. Citizens wondered aloud if they should even bother voting. It was in this time period that we, Sonya and Maureen, interviewed eighteen women from two diverse areas of Ukraine, asking them about their life stories, and their hopes and dreams. This initial part of our study took place in quiet rooms, just the two of us and a female participant who was between the ages of forty-two and eighty-one, and who had lived some of her adulthood during Soviet times. Women shared stories they had never before spoken, they said, stories about the lives of their families during their childhoods, as young women, and to the present day. Participants also reflected upon their visions for themselves, their families and Ukraine. Individual meetings were followed first by regional group visioning meetings and then a cross-regional meeting during which all participants had the opportunity to share their hopes for Ukraine and tentative plans to work together cross-region, cross-country for Ukraine.

The first phase of the research used a snowball approach to invite individual women from two diverse areas of Ukraine to share their personal stories. The second phase gathered the women together in regional groups and led them through a process of visioning as a group for their communities and for Ukraine. The third phase was to help these two diverse groups to communicate with each other about their vision and to begin to co-create a common vision. The final active part of this research was part of a feminist strategy that acknowledges the power differentials in relationships. The participants reviewed and approved their input into the final report. In the case of narrative research when an individual's life story is being shared, this step is of particular importance.



Twice – in February and in July of 2010 – we began our journey in Lviv in the western part of Ukraine and then took a thousand kilometer train trip to meet with women in Simferopol, Crimea. As a cross-country, cross-cultural tour, the train trip was both an adventure and a challenge as we moved from west to east and back. Statues of Lenin began to pop up about halfway as square, low, Soviet-style architecture replaced the multi-textured ornate buildings of Lviv.

During the study we both learned more about ourselves, our relationship, and Ukraine. Maureen initiated the study and had expected to learn from and with the participants. Sonya, as interpreter and Ukrainian citizen of mixed heritage, committed herself to the process as a favour to a friend; she was curious about the study as a process for individual empowerment and certain that she would see few commonalities in beliefs and dreams of women from two very diverse regions.

### **The Role of the Interpreter in Research**

Sonya had worked for many years as an educator and as an interpreter. She was often recruited when trans-governmental meetings took place, and when international conferences came to town. Usually she had a brief discussion with a new client as they began their work together, navigating expectations and style of speaking.

We had worked together over the period of a decade with varying intensity over time and gaps with years apart between collaborations. We had conducted workshops together, addressed large classrooms, attended and chaired group meetings, facilitated individual counselling sessions and supervision, and addressed an international conference. During our work together, we usually checked in with each other about speed of communication and clarity of meanings. We debriefed sessions, helping each other perception check and deal with emotions that accompany working with people who may be expressing thoughts never before shared, sometimes in private counselling sessions.

Our work together in 2010 was a little different in that it was a research project. A brief description of that work was shared earlier and will be referred to later in this article. In preparation for this new collaboration, we discussed the shifts in both our roles from teacher/facilitator/counsellor and interpreter to researcher and interpreter. Because of our usual collaborative approach, we were curious about how our relationship might change and how we might change the ways we worked together to meet the needs of the project.

Maureen was aware of the degree to which she relied on Sonya as the resident cultural and linguistic expert. Maureen, a Canadian of non-Ukrainian descent, knew she could not do any work in Ukraine without an interpreter and knew that Sonya's empathic abilities and her awareness of social issues made her the best possible candidate. Maureen anticipated the vulnerability of sharing personal narratives would be emotional for the participants. She wondered what the process would be like for Sonya, a woman from a similar history.

Sonya was excited about the research and the possibilities that might open for women as they became involved. She shared a great curiosity as to the response to and impact of participating in the study and the impact of the research questions/response themselves on prospective participants and Ukrainians in general who might hear about the research. Historically, speaking about one's wants and fears could have dangerous implications for Ukrainian citizens (Berkhoff 2004; Figs 2007; Marples 2007). It wasn't until near the end of the study work that we began to think about literature exploring the impact of doing cross-cultural research work on the interpreter. We found little to satisfy our curiosity.

Positivist approaches to research have insisted that the researcher remain value-free and neutral (Benz & Shapiro 1998). In the same approach, the use of an interpreter in cross-language interviews dictates the researcher tries to maintain control of the interview and the process of the interpreter; the focus is purely on the interpreter's facility with language and translation. The person who is the interpreter is meant to almost disappear in the process.

While the “neutral” and almost invisible interpreter is considered ideal, sometimes interpreters have a more active role, developing relationships not only with the researcher, but with the participants, helping “establish ties of trust and respect” (Hwa-Froelich and Westby 2003, 80). This can be done through manner of presentation and through establishing rapport with the participant independent of the researcher. After all, the interpreter is the one who can communicate openly with both researcher and participant.

Temple and Edwards (2002) write about the importance of acknowledging the crucial active, reflexive role the interpreter plays in cross-language, cross-cultural research noting “identity is produced and not merely described in language” and “gender, ethnicity and other social divisions are important aspects of both identity and language” (p.9). Thus, in our opinion, the inclusion of the interpreter in deep discussion about research is vital to understanding qualitative research; her inclusion can lead to insights much deeper than the proficient use of language and language translation.

Berman and Tyyska (2011) critique a positivist approach to qualitative research in particular, and acknowledge the importance of research team members including cross-language and cross-cultural interpreters with consideration as to the impact their roles and relationships in research site communities have on the interactions with participants and the eventual outcomes of the research as well as upon their own relationships with these players. Berman and Tyyska (2011) acknowledge that, while an interactive and inclusive relationship with an interpreter requires complicated considerations, the traditional way of working with interpreters expected by the academy can impose restrictions that limit the rich possibilities in the work. They also note that the relationship and roles the interpreter plays in her own community impact her ability to carry out her role.

There is a scarcity of research looking at the experience of the interpreter herself other than a study on posttraumatic growth by Splevins, Cohen, Joseph, Murray, and Bowley

(2010). Throughout the life of our own particular study, we found ourselves debriefing the emotional roller-coaster accompanying the honour of being trusted with deeply personal stories, which if shared in earlier times could have meant banishment or even death to some participants (Figs 2007; Marples 2007). While the content of the narratives was deeply moving, the trust placed in both of us in the story-sharing was truly humbling. We wondered about the experiences of others working together in cross-cultural research and thought that sharing one of our reflective conversations might assist others doing this kind of research.

### **Conversation in Crimea**

Our project and our relationship had close to a decade of history. In the early 2000s Maureen spent the better part of two years in Ukraine living and working as the person “on the ground” for a project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) partnering the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work with Lviv Polytechnic University, where Sonya worked, to create a social work department and work with the community to develop innovative social services in an infrastructure-poor Ukraine. In the years that followed, maintaining a working relationship with the social work department and the community, Maureen returned periodically to conduct workshops and then to do her dissertation research described briefly below. In addition to the support she offered as a friend and colleague, Sonya served as the interpreter for all of the interviews related to the study. This article is based on the conversation we had upon completing the research together in Lviv and Simferopol, Ukraine.

In the process of conducting our research in 2010, Maureen had some sense of the toll the research process might be taking on Sonya as she noted the impact on herself. We shared many conversations on the street, in the car, over a glass of cognac between interviews. These conversations were vital to debriefing our experiences of interviews. Physically, the work was draining: in Lviv the interviews usually followed upon or were placed within the middle

of a busy workday; our conversations in Simferopol followed a twenty-four hour train trip with no sleep afforded along the way. Intellectually the work became exhausting – Sonya was sometimes interpreting in three languages – Russian, Ukrainian and English. In every interview as well as other working interactions with the public, Sonya continually put aside her own story, her own beliefs and wishes, and “became” either the other participant or Maureen. Emotionally, during the work, again Sonya removed herself from everything that was not of the individual participant. Periodically a tear would fall. Most often she just mirrored what the participant and Maureen projected verbally and physically. Sonya was a conduit.

At the same time, Sonya was herself a participant of a special order in the process. As with many interpreters working in their own community, a few of our participants were already colleagues or even friends. She signed confidentiality and participant agreements, as did the participants. Still, these individuals often revealed stories previously unknown to her; and, known to her or not, many voiced sentiments and experiences close to her own heart. Others told of history and imaginings that were far from Sonya’s own. Additionally, through our interpersonal and geographical travel across the country, Sonya went on a journey of discovery with Maureen – going far beyond the call of interpreter.

The discussion included here, edited only slightly for clarity, was audiotaped at a picnic table outside the hotel we stayed at in July, 2010, on our second trip together to Crimea. The place, Applesin, was on the outskirts of a small industrial town, Nikolaiva, Crimea – at the Black Sea. The hot, hot day was just prior to our departure back to Lviv, having completed the fourth and final part of the project. We prepared to leave the place where we had met the eastern participants, going back on the train with our companions to make the twenty-four hour trek back to Lviv in the west of Ukraine. It was a trip we looked forward to; at the same

time, we knew it was the beginning of the end of our project together and that we would likely not see each other again for quite some time.

The discussion we had this particular day was fairly brief. Around the corner waited our colleagues, curious about our private conversation, and anxious to embark on sightseeing. After joking about this being an interview not needing interpretation, we began.

M. I want to talk with you about what it is like for you to do this work as a person who is an interpreter who has her own story of growing up and living in Ukraine. In our work together you are not only interpreting, you are also hearing all these stories. I don't know anyone who is actually doing what you are doing. While we have been working together, I have wondered at your work on a number of levels. First of all, you do more than interpret language: you are somehow also able to convey the emotional content. When we work together, it is like even though you are present, you disappear in a way. You become part of the person whose words you are saying. If you are interpreting for me, you say the words as I would say them. If you are interpreting for Mila, for example – I listened to Ana's conversation or story a number of times. You would say things, like she would say, for example, "And that's the way it was... and that's the way it was..." If she repeated something, you would repeat it the way that she did. This gave me a different sense of what was being conveyed – totally different than if you had spoken as a third person.

S. I have never thought about this in this direction. First of all this has been a precious experience for me because when we started I wasn't thinking about this. I mean I wasn't considering myself to be a part of the project – just an interpreter, you know. But then later on I realized that my responsibility is huge, you know because it is scientific work and much depends on the interpretation and on feelings –not only words, but feelings in meaning that I include into the words.

People are different and they work differently, this is true. There have been times in the past, when I really struggled with my translation. I was not as successful as I would have liked because I could not feel things – the person that I was going to interpret. My self-esteem went down at those times. I would find it hard to refocus and it was very hard to begin translating someone else...

And then I realized that in this world we are all connected and this connection is not vivid, you know, but I feel this connection and perhaps it is because of this I feel people, I am in this profession. I am not only interpreting, I am part of this profession because I feel people. When I have a good feeling of a person – when we are on the same page, the same tune, it is easy for me to interpret. Even when I make mistakes, it doesn't matter, I try to convey the message, not only words, but feelings, circumstances, environment. So, when

we started working on this project... Well, first of all, I was happy to work with you because we have known each other for ten years and then... I must repeat that at first I had no sense of... but then I realized that this is a very important mission. It was important even at the beginning to ask women their stories. But now, now when you, you are back in Ukraine and when you asking women to vision, and asking them to... to approve what they said, I feel, "Oh my God, is it correct? Was I correct in my interpretation?"

M. And so far so good.

S. Yes, so far, so good, thanks God. No one has asked us to change anything or to correct a sentence. I sense how important this is, how carefully you treat the stories and how necessary to share them as women tell them. This sheds a different light on the importance of two things. First, there is the value of people's life stories themselves and the meaning they have to the teller. Second, there is the work that I do. It really is critical that interpreters convey what is being said in all of its meanings.

The work that is being done here – collecting women's stories and asking them to dream is something different. I have never seen anything like this. Part of the difference is that this study comes from your involvement with us. You have been connected with people here, this country, for ten years. You know the country; you know people; and, you decided to show life from a different perspective and the influence of women and their participation in this country.

M. When you say that I know women, or I know the country, you remind me of a big fear that I had. Yes, I lived here for a time, but always with assistance. No matter what I do I was not born in Ukraine, so for you to say that I understand...

S. No, you will never understand, you will never understand. We don't understand, either! You will never open the door wide, but you will open it a centimetre. You are not a stranger in this country. You did not just drop down from space and you know, write something. It is not from a different country, it is a different world.

M. And then, the language, you have managed to open the door further, because even if I spoke Ukrainian, I have a feeling that I would have a different response from people than I would have with you with me because you and other colleagues have paved the way. You have introduced me to people. Because you introduced me, people know that if I am coming with you, I am trustworthy as well. I think this is part of it.

S. This is a matter of trust. I noticed that when we met with people the first time, especially with people in Crimea, they were more closed. Now, on this second trip, people open their hearts, their souls and they were seeking more conversations with you. They want to tell you more. They were smiling and they were open and now they are a team. They spend time with each other, and take pleasure in each other's company.

*[During the regional visioning meetings and after, women commented on how they valued each other and how connected they felt. They said this with awe, realizing that they would not have previously considered some of their group members to be friends or allies. See also Flaherty (2012) for more on this phenomenon.]*

So, saying that they trust me, no they trust you. But because I feel you so well, well... I do it, it is hard to say... [She paused reflecting, searching for words.] Well, how I interpret, it's not a professional issue because there are many better interpreters I am sure who know the language better than I do. But because I feel you, I feel people, I can adjust and I can hide in the shade.

M. I like the way you put that! I like the picture you paint.

S. This is not a matter of language, of knowing language, I think. This is more a matter of feeling and understanding people – a matter of compassion even.

M. You know that makes sense. As you are speaking, I am wondering if it may have been easier to interpret with the people from Lviv, not because of the language, but because you know that a lot of their beliefs are similar to yours. But then when we came here, I noticed that even here you were still able to interpret, even though, sometimes we had conversations after when you said, "That really annoyed me because that person doesn't like the sound of the Ukrainian language," and so forth.

S. Because I interpret on the emotional level and I pick up the emotions.

M. But you respected the person and honoured their story whoever that person is, even if you didn't like their politics.

S. But we don't have to like everybody.

M. Absolutely, you are a professional.

S. And we don't have to agree with everybody in this life. It will never happen in the world. We will always have some misunderstandings, you know.

M. Still, I think it is a huge thing that you are able to again, allow yourself to be in the shadow and not change or get in the way of what the other person is saying even when you don't agree with it. I have worked with other interpreters who clearly show when they don't agree with or like what is being said by the person they are interpreting. The words may come across, but they are coloured either by the interpreter's emotions or a shade of neutrality that the interpreter uses to try to keep their own feelings out of it. S., you seem to be able to almost become the other person, or persons. You become each person in turn as they speak.



S. My job in this project is not to judge. My job in this project is to convey the main idea, the message, and language, if I can do this.

M. And you are doing a fine job.

S. Because you are doing a scientific research; it is not just fiction. All my likes and dislikes are personal, to be kept to myself while doing this job. I understand, however, that much depends on our past and personal experience. I am pretty sure that if I spent my childhood in Crimea, my views would be different. Because I am from western Ukraine, I am different. But then I was raised in a kind of international home. Half of me is Ukrainian – very nationalistic Ukrainian. Another half of me is very Russian.

M. So some of what people say resonates with different parts of you.

S. Yes, their past with my past. And it is impossible to get rid of the past; our past is something we cannot change. But if we want to be successful in this world, if I want my country to be successful on the world arena so to say, we must learn to peacefully coexist. So whether I like or dislike another's point of view should not hinder my ability to hear their story or get along with them.

M. Sonya, I recall you saying that your thoughts about your role kind of shifted as we went along and you realized what we were really trying to do together here. I say "we" meaning you and me and all of the participants in this project. You spoke about your role taking on even more importance than the usual importance of interpretation in any given context. You mentioned you began to realize that we were doing peace-building work and how important each conversation was as a contributor to that process. That deeply touched me. In that vein, I wonder if anything else shifted for you here, if you noticed any other thoughts different from when you began – because of, or in the process of the work.

S. Well, when I signed confidentiality forms for myself and as a witness for others, I was reminded, that I cannot share what I have heard. But this information is inside and I have been thinking about this inside all the time. For one thing, some people that you interviewed were not strangers to me. I knew them. I am surprised at how differently I look at them now and I think, "This person is much deeper, or smarter, or suffered a lot." So, different things.

M. You know things about them that you didn't know before.

S. I didn't know and how could I, because we did not share these thing. And again this is a responsibility because we know each other and I know some private things about them. It means that I have no right to share this information and at the same time I live with this information. It is hard. And I have to treat them, without... like, so the same way I did before I heard their stories.

*[As noted earlier, it was uncommon during Soviet times, and to this day, for people to share personal stories, thoughts, or feelings as, particularly during Stalin's times, sharing these personal details could mean a trip to the gulag or death for oneself or one's family (Figes 2007)].*

M. As if you didn't know these parts of their stories, even though you have been touched by them.

S. Yes, somehow as if I didn't know this because I learned about them during a confidential conversation. You will share parts of their stories in your write-up, but in a way, I kind of 'overheard' their stories. Unless the participants invite me to talk about these conversations, the stories are not mine to discuss.

M. You have had a different kind of intimate relationship with these people for that moment.

S. Yes, like yesterday when [name of a participant from Simferopol] said she would like Crimea to be connected to Russia. This is her position and she has the right to say this. She said this because her life experience is different from mine. All her relatives live in Russia and she is disconnected. She has to pay lots of money to fly there, to go see them. Even her children live there.

*[In Soviet times travel through the USSR was fairly inexpensive and accessible for people who had visas.]*

M. So, in one type of situation, a few of the participants knew you prior to the study; they knew you as a colleague or someone's friend or relative. But now that relationship has another level, one that may or may not be spoken about. The new twist to some of the relationships is that now you know the individuals in slightly different ways, with a different depth. You have a different understanding of them, and slightly different, perhaps deeper feelings. At the same time this is a one-way exchange; they do not have the same intimate knowledge of you. Still, you must manage your relationships with them as if you had never heard their stories – as you knew them before. You know, I have wondered if there were any surprises for you during the individual storytelling.

S. Yes, the ways people were raised, what they think, how they think. Many surprises. And many cultural openings. I learned something new about cultures in general and a couple of cultures in specific and now I think about how wonderful and diverse the world is and we all are so different. We have different backgrounds, we are raised in different cultures but we are one small world. And when I look at women, especially from eastern cultures, you know they differ from us. I look at some women and think about how much they have lost in their lives. I think about different cultural norms for dress and behaviour and I think, "If this is alright with her then who am I to judge?" I have a different view of things. Even if I don't accept the same norms, my role is not to judge. I see differences in the way people raise their children. They do this with love and they do whatever they can. Some dig up the earth to help

their children, but they do it in a different way. They have a different life and it doesn't mean that their life is worse.

M. Yes. Not worse nor less...

S. This work has brought me into contact with different people. In general, I think that I am tolerant with people but working on this project, hearing these stories has been another kind of lesson for me – about accepting people, learning from people, and supporting people. I am not speaking about people who behave in extreme or destructive ways. I mean diversity.

M. So, your values underline the way you work. You don't have to agree with the way people express their beliefs, or even the beliefs themselves as long as in working with them you are true to your own values.

S. Yes, and I think, "What right do I have to judge, to say that you are wrong?"

M. We have commented on the diversity of our participants' points of view. You accommodated them without a blink. And I remember that you switched languages often. We had planned to do the interviews in Ukrainian, but I remember in Lviv there were two cases at least when women who speak Ukrainian wanted to share their stories in Russian. As a strong proponent for the use of the Ukrainian language in Ukraine, what was that like for you?

S. So, Russian is my native tongue – from childhood. At the same time I am used to translating from Ukrainian into English and back. For me this is fairly easy. It was more challenging, but manageable for me to do the work in Russian.

M. But were you surprised that women who you normally converse with in Ukrainian wanted to speak Russian?

S. No, I was not. In the West for sure, Ukrainian is our language of use everyday – in conversation, in business, at home. But when you asked women to speak about their memories, those memories come in Russian. Russian was the language we were supposed to use when we were growing in Soviet times. We were taught in Russian in our schools. The main language of the women's formative years was Russian. This is my past as well. My childhood was Russian. And I think I told you that when I speak Ukrainian I am one person, and when I speak Russian I am another. And English another.

M. Thinking about this project, what has been the most challenging part for you?

S. *[Following a long pause.]* Responsibility. This is the hardest part, because I am responsible not only for translation, but I am responsible to you as well. Almost everything depends on the stories. You read the background theory yourself, in English; for that you don't need me. I think that the main part is

people's stories and this is the responsibility, the most important part for me. I wouldn't say it is difficult, but I would say, it is important, how to say, not to betray you, not to spoil this work.

M. I know that you are always very careful to say what I say... to convey that. Funny, since the first time we worked together, I never really thought or was concerned about that. I listen to you and you look at me to be sure that we are together on something. Sometimes you struggle with a phrase or a thought and for me that is confirmation that you are doing what I need you to do. I know that you are meticulous about sharing the women's stories clearly. I guess it makes sense that you are also concerned that you convey what I want to convey as well.

S. This is a huge responsibility and this means a lot to you.

M. It does. Without your skill communication, the work, particularly the depth with which we work, would not be possible.

S. And I want to be useful and not to cause you any harm.

M. Wow! I never thought of this as a personal thing...

S. It is not just a personal thing, but you are doing a scientific thing – research. It is not a fairy tale. We are conveying people's stories. It means that both of us are responsible for them. They give their permission, but at the same time, if I say a wrong word, you will put it down and then it will just spoil the whole thing.

M. So, when we are going around and asking people if we have got it right, if we have written it correctly, you have said that it makes you a little nervous, because it is like, checking on your translation as well as my understanding and representation of their stories.

*[See for example Chase (2005), Fine and Speer (1992), Minow (2008), and Sprague (2005).]*

S. Yes

M. How does it feel for you when you find out that yes, you absolutely understood and translated or interpreted precisely as they had intended their stories.

S. Great. It is more than a relief. The work will be written and you will convey our situation realistically.

M. I am amazed at the bravery of the participants. They all said that they spoke as they never had before. They said it felt good to do this, and to think and speak about their hopes. So, S., what are your hopes?

S. I hope to see this study in a book, and maybe even a play. And I wish you success, to be able to continue to do this work. I see that this is not just paper for you, it is a part of your life.

M. It is a part of my life, as is this conversation and I cannot thank you enough for being such a huge part of it. Is there anything else you want to mention about this experience?

S. Thank you very much for involving me in this. It is not a project, it is a process and sometimes the process is more important than the result. I am certain that this process is very important to all those involved and it adds to our relationships with others because we understand ourselves better. Once more, reflecting on the work of an interpreter, I realize that not only words are important in interpreting information. So, feelings are very important: when we feel people, even when we don't agree with them, when we feel people, work will be ok, and information will be conveyed – realistic information. But when there is no connection... So, it is very important for international projects to be very particular when hiring interpreters, to hire someone who not only knows the language but also understands and cares about the issue. People spend a lot of money and time on important communication, so we must pick the right people, not to spoil things.

### **Considerations**

Our audiotaped conversation ended here, but our communication continues. We think about future research work together and hope that our reflections may be of assistance not only to us, but also to others in their research work. Following are some of our thoughts.

First, when we reflect on the experience Sonya had, we know that the interpreter must be considered a co-participant in every way in cross-language, cross-cultural research. In her work she is reflective not only of the practitioner, but also of the other participants. This means that she must have a relationship of trust with the practitioner and be seen as equally trustworthy to the community with whom she works. The interpreter becomes the face of the inquirer and the conduit to the community. To enhance these important connections, having the cultural base, the interpreter must be included early in planning where and how the study takes place. She must have a thorough understanding of the principles of the work being done in order to mirror the primary researcher. She is also uniquely positioned to assist the

practitioner with assessing the impact of the work on the participants and the climate within which the work is taking place.

Second, as a co-participant in the unique position of mirroring inquirer and participant, the interpreter's work should be made "visible" in the research. That is, her insights about the work should be included in the written representation of the work. She has a window into the worlds of all involved and her insights have the potential to add another layer of understanding to what has taken place.

Third, given her integral, unique role, the interpreter stands to be doubly impacted by the work – even more so when the cultural context is her own. Narratives often bump up against one another and intensify still others. Therefore, it is vital that steps are taken to debrief with her and to pace the work such that she has time to recover not only physically and intellectually, but also emotionally. Without this kind of communication and involvement, she is left to carry the stories that she has heard and experienced (Herman 1992/1997). Acknowledging the potential impact, we recommend more in-depth research with interpreters working cross-culturally, particularly in post-colonial, post-traumatic situations.

Finally, the engagement or selection of an interpreter should be done with great care and consideration. Beyond the question of facility in language, does her empathy allow her to put aside her own story during the research process? Does she understand the methodology and, to some extent, the theoretical background of the research? If possible, for consistency in participatory action research in particular, the same interpreter should be used for the entire study. It is a great responsibility for the interpreter, and requires careful planning so that her involvement is a positive experience for not only for the participants but also for her own sake. This kind of in-depth commitment is often not possible, but when it is, the experience of the study stands to be greatly enriched by all involved, including future readers.

Additionally, and no less important, the practice of research is then consistent with PAR values of participant inclusion in the co-construction of knowledge, particularly with communities which have been oppressed (McIntyre 2008).

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