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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY
THIRD ARTS AND VISITING, SEMESTER ONE 2000-2001
HI346: ORAL HISTORY AND PERSONAL TESTIMONY

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C.Clear

Time **TWO** hours
Answer **TWO** questions

1. Discuss the various ways of selecting a topic and interviewees/contributors in an oral history project, giving examples from your reading.
2. 'Oral sources are credible, but with a different credibility.' (Portelli.) Discuss.
3. Ronald Grele says oral historians are 'strangers, often loving strangers, but strangers nonetheless', to the people they interview. Do you agree? Discuss the problem of relationships and empathy in oral history.
4. 'We will learn what we want to know only by listening to people who are not accustomed to talking.' (S.Armitage, quoted by Kristina Minister.) Is one kind of oral history interview/narrative, or indeed narrator, superior to another?
5. 'In an unethical world, we cannot truly do ethical research.' (Daphne Patai.) Discuss, with reference to oral history.
6. Raphael Samuel refers to 'the perils of the transcript'. What does he mean, and are the problems with the written rendering of oral testimony?
7. Can written personal testimony (i.e. that which is, like oral testimony, called into being by the researcher) be evaluated in the same way as oral evidence? What are the similarities and what are the differences?
8. Portelli warns about the dangers of oral history becoming 'two monologues; informants supply a monologue of brute facts, while historians and anthropologists will supply - later from their desks - a monologue of sophisticated ideas that the informant never hears about.' What are the main concerns of the oral historian in the presentation of oral history?