

Course Oral History and Life Stories 2020

Course Supervisor: prof. dr. Selma Leydesdorff

Dates: 14 and 21 January 2020 all day

Digital event, via Zoom

Candidates: PhD candidates and advanced RMa students

Credits: 2 ECTS, with paper 5-6 ECTS

Registration: Before 19 December 2020 (bureau@onderzoekschoolpolitiekegeschiedenis.nl)

Students and PhD candidates willing to participate have to write a motivation letter of one page

before 19 December 2020 to margit.van.der.steen@huygens.knaw.nl

Fee (non members): 250 euro



The course

Historians and others who interview about the past often talk about memory and how they are informed by memory, while they know memory is a difficult and problematic source for historical knowledge. During this course, we shall concentrate on the use of memory in historical research and look at the kind of knowledge we get when we interview. We will investigate various efforts to create a more systematic and theoretically grounded approach than 'just talking about days long gone' or 'having a chat about the past'. How can we create a research pattern that overcomes the incidental and replace it by an integration of the changing character of spoken narratives about the past? When can we trust a story, why? And if we cannot, why can it still be important to listen. In addition, how do we listen?

General starting-point for discussion is the study of life stories in oral history as a tradition in the humanities and in the social sciences. During the course, additional attention will be given to alternative modes of in-depth interviews. Issues to be investigated in particular concern the questions of intersubjectivity; (self) reflection; identification with the Other and her/his past; and the interviewer's role in the process of meaning/knowledge production. What are our responsibilities towards people we interview and do we have particular responsibilities in our research communities? What does it mean to be close to an interviewee, what happens if there is distance or when we do not like what we hear? Do we have to agree with our interviewees?

Part of the teaching will be done by looking at oral histories made by oral historians who published their interviews on websites. Participants will get the links and will discuss the online material as part of the assignment.

This is not a class on how to interview but on how to approach the field of the creation of narrative data. Basic is the idea that a historical interview is the place where two persons collaborate on the creation of a narrative space, which can be interpreted in various ways. During the course, several theoretical approaches are discussed. Apart from lectures by Selma Leydesdorff on theoretical approaches and past work, guest lecturers are invited as well to explain how they overcome difficulties

during their research and we'll discuss the various approaches of the students. The session is as interactive as possible. Guest lecturers are Fridus Steijlen, Marie Louise Janssen, Nanci Adler. The session will be based on extensive literature.

The class will cover two days January 14 and 21 (2021) with a long interruption. Participants are asked to write a motivation of 1 page before 19 December 2020. There is a maximum of 15 participants. The session is open to both PhD candidates as well as research master students. The supervisor is prof. Selma Leydesdorff.

Testing and evaluative criteria

Presence during class is obligatory including collaboration on preparing the discussions. Rema students are requested to write 2000 words paper on one subject in the literature or about the integration of the course in their own work. PhD students who need credit points are requested to present a 3500 words paper on how they will use the literature. The deadline for handing in the papers is **31 April 2021**.

Preparation, literature and assignment

The literature consists of various articles, informing on how to organize a larger interview project, or discussing how to analyse interviews.. The list of literature is available below.

Advanced researchers who want to refresh their knowledge with recent literature and who want to bring their problems and subjects to the discussion will be welcome. They are asked to accept a status in which they are equal with other participants.

During every meeting, the literature as mentioned in the program will be discussed.

Program

14 January Morning:

Selma Leydesdorff

Introduction into the use of oral sources, also during the pandemic

<https://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/covid-19/>

How to make an interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xk3gb9xCTFo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pISyP-uDzU>

Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes Oral History Different', in: Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York, 1992) 45-58.

Erika Apfelbaum, 'Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory', in: Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, *Memories, Theories, Debates* (New York, 2010) 77-92.

Alessandro Portelli, 'Living Voices: The Oral History Interview as Dialogue and Experience', *Oral History Review* 2 (2018) 239-248.

14 January Afternoon :

Fridus Steijlen will speak about his participation in the project 'Decolonization and Violence and War in Indonesia' where he is doing interviews.

The section on large collections deals with questions like how to set up a large project and how to organize a large collection of different parties and make the interviews available? What are the consequences of digitalization? Who owns material, the release of papers.

<https://www.ind45-50.org/getuigen-en-tijdgenoten>

Selma Leydesdorff

Collections and memory in the digital age

Alexander Freund, 'Oral History Process Generated Data', *Historical Social Research* 34 (2009) 22-48.

Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, Chapter I 'Introduction: Turning Practice into History' and Chapter VI 'Narrative' (New York, 2010) 1-18 and 106-130.

Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, 'Slowing Down to Listen in the Digital Age: How New Technology Is Changing Oral History Practice', *Oral History Review* 1 (2017) 94-112.

21 January Morning

Marie Louise Janssen will speak on interviewing in 'other worlds', another culture and interviews about secret knowledge. How to interview illegal undocumented women in prison? Marie Louise Janssen will discuss her work on Chinese women in massage parlours and how she approached them.

Marie-Louise Janssen, 'The fluidity of a 'happy ending'. Chinese masseuses in the Netherlands', in: May-Len Skilbrei and Marlene Spanger (ed.), *Understanding Sex for Sale. Meanings and Moralities in Sexual Commerce* (New York and London, 2017) 142-158.

Selma Leydesdorff on remembering 'other worlds'

Marianne Horsdal, 'The narrative interview - method, theory and ethics: Unfolding a life', in: *The Routledge International Handbook on Narrative and Life History* (New York and London, 2017) 260-271.

Kenneth J. Bindas, 'Re-Remembering a Segregated Past: Race in American Memory', *History & Memory* 1 (2010) 113-134.

Belina Bozzoli, 'Interviewing the Women of Phokeng', in: Rob Perks and Al Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998) 145-156.

21 January Afternoon

Nanci Adler on Trauma and staying loyal to the oppressor:

Nanci Adler "The Legacies of Stalinist Repression: Narratives of the Children of Loyalist Enemies of the People" in Nanci Adler, Selma Leydesdorff (eds) *Tapestry of Memory, Evidence and Testimony in Life- Story Narratives* (New runswick, London 2013) 19-37

Selma Leydesdorff: Interviews with traumatized people

Selma Leydesdorff, 'When all is lost: Metanarrative in the Oral History of Hanifa, Survivor of Srebrenica', in: Cave, M. and Sloane, S.M., *Listening on the Edge, Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis* (New York, 2014) 17-33.

Selma Leydesdorff, 'Aleksandr (Sasha) Pechersky (1909-1990). In Search of a life story', in: I. Goodson et.al, *The Routledge International Handbook on Narrative and Life History* (New York and London, 2017) 318-331.

Guest lecturers:



Prof. dr. Nanci Adler is Professor of Memory, History and Transitional Justice at the University of Amsterdam's (UvA). The chair was established in partnership with the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).



Prof. dr. Fridus Steijlen is Endowed Professor 'Moluccan Migration and Culture in a comparative perspective' at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the VU University, Amsterdam, and senior researcher at KITLV.



Dr. Marie Louise Janssen lectures in the areas of gender and sexuality studies, social sciences and research methods and techniques at the department of Sociology of the University of Amsterdam. Her academic interests revolve around the intersection of sex work, migration and human trafficking.



Prof. dr. Selma Leydesdorff is professor emerita of oral history and culture (University of Amsterdam). Over the last ten years she interviewed on life in concentration camps and recorded interviews with survivors of Auschwitz and Mauthausen in international projects. In 2002, she started a project with survivors of Srebrenica and since 2008, she has recorded life stories around the trial of John Demjanjuk in Munich. Recent publications include *Sasha Pechersky: Holocaust hero, Sobibor Resistance Leader and Hostage of History. Memory and Narrative*. New York: Routledge 2017 and *Narratives of the Survivors of Srebrenica: How Do They Reconnect to the World?* In E. Bemporad, & J. W. Warren (Eds.), *Women and Genocide: Survivors, Victims, Perpetrators* (pp. 250-267). Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2018.

