

## Manual for Oral history interviews and transcriptions



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## Colophon

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## Introduction

This manual gives a description on how one can carry out individual interviews in oral history projects. It offers guidelines and some methodological helping for interviewers and others who would like to conduct oral history interviews (with refugees). The principles of interviewing given in this manual are also taught during the oral history training for the fieldworker of the project Specially Unknown. The manual also provides some learning points obtained within the Dutch project *Ongekend bijzonder*.

### The project Specially Unknown

In October 2017, the Foundation BMP (Foundation for the Promotion of Social Participation), started with four partners (from Antwerp, Bochum, Paris and Turin) the European refugee oral history project Specially Unknown EU, the cultural contributions of refugees to European cities.

One of the main objective of the project is to promote the participation of third country nationals with a refugee background in cultural life and in society overall by collecting 160 life stories of refugees in four European cities (oral history interviews by (refugee) fieldworkers) and establishing a European database of English subtitled oral history interviews of the 160 interviews and the 248 Dutch refugee interviews. Based on the themes distracted from the interview material the projects aim is to produce several cultural productions in co-creation between museums, archives and cultural organizations with refugees, for a large public in each city.

In this way the project aims to contributes to:

- The capacity building of the fieldworkers
- Empowerment of refugee communities
- Diversification of European heritage institutions
- Another image of refugees in the public opinion
- New working relationships between cultural institutions and refugees
- Lasting source material for research
- New policy measures on the integration of refugees.

### The role of fieldworkers within the project

For the gathering of 160 oral history interviews a careful selection of interviewers (fieldworkers) is important. The fieldworkers will receive a special oral history training in which they are prepared to complete individual oral history interviews with refugees. For Specially Unknown, the following traits were chosen for selecting fieldworkers.

1. Academic level of education or comparable experience. This is important to be able to understand the theoretical part of the training, and to be able to recognise connections during the interviews and to ask follow-up questions;

2. A good command of the relevant languages for the project in speech and writing. Whenever interviews are conducted in their mother tongue, the interviewer should translate as well as transcribe;
3. Excellent communication skills and developed empathic ability, able to listen without judging;
4. Interested / experienced in conducting in-depth interviews (recommended);
5. Interested in the discipline of oral history;
6. Basic knowledge of the history of the own community and the country of origin;
7. Knowledge of their own community and being part of a social network within that community;
8. Able to work independently and to form a solid team with the other fieldworkers;
9. Affinity /experience with co-creation processes in the cultural field.

The educated interviewers (fieldworkers) are given the task to involve the communities in the different cities with the project to:

- decide with them, which people are interesting to approach for collecting the total of 160 stories;
- brainstorm about presentation forms that can be developed in co-creation with the refugee communities;
- activate organisations and persons from those communities to create their own artistic presentations with the support of professionals from the art sector.

### Reading guide

In the first chapter a short introduction on the discipline of oral history is provided. After this, in chapter two a description is given about the interview methodology and the used techniques for an oral history interview, as discussed during the training. As far as possible, practical applications will be included in describing the methodology. In chapter three the procedure for the registration and administration of the oral history material will be explained. Chapter four focuses on the specific points of attention that are applicable for interviewing refugees, and the diversity within this target group. Lastly, we will share some thoughts for further research based on the obtained source material. This manual is meant as an addition to the Specially Unknown oral history training for fieldworkers, but could also be used on its own.

# 1. Oral history as a discipline

## Backgrounds

Although the term oral history is only being used widely since rather recently, there are examples of historiography from the 19th century focused on oral sources. During the last decades, the term oral history is mostly used to indicate a certain method of historiography that focuses on collecting stories of people who have experienced a certain event, or whose life story is typical for a certain group or a certain period through interviews. Oral history in this sense is a type of historiography that does not only look for facts, or large events and the story of influential people, but also for the stories of people who stay out of focus in dominant historiography. For this, it is also about the meaning that people give to their lives and the context in which this takes place.

Oral history, also called oral culture, is a term not only used by historians, but also by anthropologists. This started with the manner in which illiterate peoples remember and transfer their history. Typical of these stories are the strong interconnectedness between history and mythology, and that heroism and morale play important roles in these. These days, the term oral history is also more widely used in anthropology, and it is also used to describe current cultural contexts of peoples and organisations from the inside. Since the nineties of the last century, organisations like Unesco point out the importance to pay attention to intangible cultural heritage, which is not tangible, but offers vital sources of cultural heritage for the culture and identity of groups of people. Oral history of the under-represented groups in a western society are also included in this.

An example of oral history in an anthropological sense is the book *Indaba my Children* that appeared in 1964, by Zulu writer Vusamazoe Credo Mutwa, in which he describes the story of the origin of the peoples and their family, as it is passed on by the Zulus in South Africa through generations, to help understand the clash between white and black in South Africa.

The French historian Jules Michelet is one of the first to use interviews. In 1853 he wrote his book *Histoire de la Révolution Française* based on the interviews of eyewitnesses. This working method provided him with information he would have never found in official reports and statistics. In the twenties of the last century, W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki conducted a ground breaking research based on ego documents such as letters and diaries about the immigration of Polish farmers to the United States. During this period, research was conducted in the same manner regarding slavery, migration to the west, and the history of Native Americans.

In 1968, the British historian Paul Thompson published the book *The Voice of the Past, Oral history*. This book is one of the first works in which the term oral history is explained. It has since appeared in many different editions and translations.

In the Netherlands, the big breakthrough is in the sixties. Inspired by the idea of democratisation and the second wave of feminism, there is an interest in groups that have been under represented in written history, such as the working class and women. In 1979, the Dutch Association for Historical Oral Documentation is founded, which was led by historian Selma Leydesdorff. This association was active until 1990, and has been restarted in the Dutch National Work Group of Oral History, included by the Huizinga Institute. Mostly initiatives by the women's rights movement have pushed the development of the oral history method, because the history of women and their contribution to society was partially left out in the general manner of historiography.

In the past years, oral history found its way within literature more and more. Not long ago, the book Congo partly based on oral history by the Flemish writer David van Reybrouck, won de AKO literature price (Dutch and Flemish literature price).

The internet also increases the awareness of the methodical approach of oral history. On Canadian, American and UK websites, elaborate manuals about quality requirements for oral history interviews are indicated, and in which manner they can be recorded and saved best. The internet offers an excellent possibility to save created and collected sources and to make them accessible. An accompanied effect of the use of the internet for the development of oral history is that this medium also invites people who will normally not find their way into archives and libraries to study the subject and the sources. The manner in which the internet can contribute to making sources accessible, the development of a new project, the implementation of studies, and spreading the results is one of the parts of the program of the project oral history project Specially Unknown.

### Interviewing techniques

The discipline of oral history makes use of special interview techniques that are aimed towards collecting stories about important events, and typical periods from recent history.

An oral history interview has two important features:

1. The emphasis is on the memories and perceptions of the respondent;
2. The interviewer has the important task of making sure that the interviewee talks.

There is a big difference between a journalistic interview and an oral history interview. A journalistic interview is focused on acquiring as much information as possible, and challenging the respondent through direct interventions to tell facts that they have preferred to keep a secret. An oral history interview on the other hand, focuses on letting the person interviewed talk independently as much as possible, and interfering as little as possible. The interview is mostly guided by connecting the stories told and by asking more questions about them.

## 2. Interview methodology

In this chapter, we will focus on the interview techniques, expectations of the interviews that existed beforehand, and the lessons learnt based on the practice experiences.

For a good oral history interview, the following aspects are important:

- **The right approach of possible respondents:** It is important to approach possible respondents in a manner that increases their motivation to participate in the interview. A good preparatory interview helps with this.
- **Good communication about the research questions and the project, the expectations and further process with the respondents:** The respondents have the right to know which kind of questions will be asked and why beforehand. Besides this, people like to know what happens to the content of the interview. Beforehand, information is provided about the privacy and the manner in which the interviews are safeguarded within the project.
- **Choice of setting and place of the interview:** The interview should take place at a location that makes the respondent as comfortable as possible.
- **Creating trust:** A good match between the interviewer and the respondent are essential for the quality of the interview. The respondent should want to tell their story to the interviewer, therefore a good confidential relationship is necessary.
- **Good list of questions or topics:** It is important to think thoroughly about the subjects and questions that should be discussed during the interview. A good list of subjects or topics is therefore essential.
- **Listening well:** The interviewed person must be at the centre of attention. The oral history interviewer must hold back. It is not intended that the interviewers work through a list of question or topic routinely, but listen carefully to the story.
- **Handling emotions during the interview:** Telling a life story often evokes emotions. The interviewer should be prepared for this and know how to handle when the respondents becomes emotional.
- **Interventions during the interview:** In the best situation an oral history is not intervened he most difficult part of an interview is to decide upon moments of intervention. Each intervention will interrupt the respondent's story. The intervention should therefore be empathetic and connected to what is being told.
- **A pleasant closure:** A pleasant closure of the interview will make the respondent feel like the interview was important and that they have contributed to the aims of the project.

We will explain these aspects further below.

## Approach of the respondents

It is important to approach a respondents in a way that increases their motivation to participate with the interview. A good preparatory interview helps with this. During this preparatory interview, it can become clear if the respondent fits the chosen profile of the persons to be interviewed, and if the trust of this person can be earned. Information about the interview should be offered, and the respondent should be told what will happen with the material. Experience tells us that persons who are well prepared are more motivated to tell their story and this also contributes to the quality of the interviews.

Please make use of appendices:

III. Example metadata

IV. Consent form

and VII. Statement of the project organisation

## Preparatory interview

Make sure that all important information about the person (age, country of origin, etc.) are learnt during the preparatory interview, without turning it into a formal conversation. Try to remember the information and write it down immediately when coming home (read the metadata form thoroughly beforehand). Please hand out the statement form see Appendix VII. (This statement form of the organisation should be handed over to the interviewee during the preparatory interview)

If someone hesitates if they should participate or not, you can answer that there are enough other people who want to join. However, it is a shame that these special stories will not be part of historiography, and others will.

The first contact:

- Some respondents feel like telling their entire story during the first contact. This is generally not advisable. The fieldworker should not get overwhelmed in a situation like this, but should limit the conversation to a (possibly elaborate) introduction.
- Interruptions during the interview are usually very disrupting. It is therefore better to inform the respondent in advance that there are no other persons (partner, friends, children) and/or pets are present during the interview. The absence of others can facilitate the interview for themselves and is better for the quality of it.
- It is advisable to check if the respondent is truly a suitable candidate during the introduction. This means checking if they have a suitable story to be told and if they are a good storyteller. This is why the introduction should be of an exploratory nature. Both parties should be able to refuse the interview after the introduction.
- The respondents have the right to know which questions will be asked and why. Furthermore, people like to know what happens to the content of the interview. Sometimes, people like to keep some information secret. The interviewer should in all cases provide the correct information and be clear towards the respondent regarding the nature of the interview and the objectives of the project.
- A good match between the interviewer and the respondent are essential for the quality of the interview. The respondent should want to tell their story to the interviewer. A good preparatory interview helps with this, but the attitude of the interviewer is just as important. This attitude must demonstrate a great empathetic ability and visible interest in the story of the respondent.

When selecting a person to interview keep in mind not to choose persons who are struggling to talk in front of the camera. The introduction (the preparatory interview) should really be seen as a moment

of choice, and not as a moment after which a next appointment must be made. This also applies that the interviewer has to create trust. When the respondent is quiet during an interview and gives short and often weak informative answers could mean that there is a lack of trust. To consider whether this attitude as a matter of trust, a culture issue, personality, or accidental circumstance depends on the circumstances. It is often a combination of different factors.

It can therefore be advisable to pay extra attention to the openness or closedness of respondents during the preparatory interview. Smart questions to find out why someone is being quiet can also be practised. It is better to address these issues during the preparatory interview than during the interview.

### Choice of setting and place of the interview

The interview should take place at a location that makes the respondent as comfortable as possible. This could be the respondent's home, but it could also be a place chosen by the respondent. The home of the respondent is preferred if it is quiet and if there is a possibility to work without interruptions. Of course, the respondent should indicate which place is more suitable for them. However, it is important to know if this place is in a busy environment or not. For instance when street workers start drilling into the pavement, the sound of the interview will be difficult to hear.

If the interview setting is at the home of the respondent, it is also important to check where the respondents normally likes to sit. Everyone has his/her favourite spot in their home. It is important to bring the respondent in a situation that is as comfortable as possible. But the angle of the light is just as important as the comfort of the respondent. The recording of an interview can become very dark if the respondent is sitting facing away from the window. Because of this, there will be a lot of back light. As a fieldworker one could probably think that it is impolite to change the interior of the home of the respondent. Coping with such situations requires a lot of tact. During the preparatory interview as well as at the start of the interview, the fieldworker should make clear that a good setting is very important. The easiest way is to look for the most ideal situation regarding comfort, sound, interruption, and light together with the person to be interviewed, beforehand for instance during the preparatory interview.

### List of questions or topics

It is important to think thoroughly about the subjects and questions that should be discussed during the interview. A good list of subjects or topics is essential (see appendix VI: list of topics).

One of the aims of the Dutch project Ongekend Bijzonder was to research the contributions of refugee to the development of Dutch cities. But during the interviews it wasn't common to ask the respondent directly about their contribution to the city. The idea was that this would provide too many answers that would be thought of as right answers. Therefore, the term 'contribution' was divided into topics such as: work, education, leisure, relationships with others, ambitions, etc.

By using a list of topics, the respondent is given the freedom to tell what fits within their own context. A list of questions that is too structured usually disrupts the narrative mode. What is also handy about a list of topics, is that these can be used in any order, depending on the manner in which the conversation develops.

Working with a list of topics usually takes intuition and experience. It is explicitly advised against to work your way through a list of topics from front to back. That also applies to a list of questions. The respondents do not always tell their story in a logical or a chronological order. Sometimes they remember something special, and start with a new story in the middle of a story. The respondent

should then be given a chance to finish their stories to come back to the original story. If this does not happen, the interviewer can steer the conversation in the right direction. The topics can also be crossed off when they have been discussed sufficiently without explicitly asking about them. The quality of the interview is closely connected to the manner in which the topics are discussed.

Some points of attention:

- When the respondent is in the flow of their story, crossing off topics is more suitable than asking focused questions.
- New topics that are not on the list yet are also discussed. Some of these topics are essential. The fieldworker should write down these topics to decide later if they should be additional items on the topic lists. (The project coordinator should be consulted about this).
- If one is not finished with a topic yet, or the interviewer is not yet satisfied with the results, it is important to ask follow-up questions. At that moment, intuition and experience are helpful. It is often the non-verbal communication that shows whether a topic was discussed sufficiently or not. Making eye contact and extra attention for non-verbal cues are therefore necessary.
- The topics make up a dynamic whole during the interview. Additions and elaborations can be made to them, sometimes, certain topics can also disappear. Exchanging experience within the project could lead to an enrichment of the topic list, and therefore increase the quality of future interviews.

Working with topics is the backbone of an interview. Working through the topic list without flexibility will not improve the quality of the interview. If it becomes clear that a fieldworker struggles with this during the training, they should practice it more. It is also advisable to take note of the ability to listen well and steer as discretely as possible when selecting the interviewees. Frequent meetings of the interviewees within the project to discuss experiences with the topics is advisable. One could decide together to add a new topic when conducting the rest of the interviews.

### Asking questions during the interview

Ask short, clear, questions. Realise that you know in which city, district, etc. the conversation takes place, but the audience does not. The audience knows nothing.

- Do not summarise what the person said in between.
- Do not give your own interpretations or opinions about social issues.
- Do not ask about opinions regarding political issues, policies, etc., but ask about experiences (think about the location, time, and person who were involved).
- Therefore, ask questions like: when was this? How did you get there? Why did you do that? But what was your impression of that? How did that feel? Etc. are good questions.
- Let the interviewee know that you are listening, and respond to what they say, but do not keep repeating: Please, go on....
- Find a good balance between letting the interviewee talk and inviting them to talk and guiding the conversation in the right direction.
- At the end of the conversation, you are allowed to repeat something you heard as a last question... (See further under heading: A pleasant closure)

Ask about the location, time, and persons, but make sure that you do not disturb the interviewee's storytelling mode. (Find a good balance between letting them talk and guiding them). But also make sure the conversation does not turn into a formal one. Especially when emotions come out, it becomes more difficult, try to keep asking questions without making it too hard on the interviewee. Consent form, etc.

## Listening well

The interviewed person must be at the centre of attention. The oral history interviewer must hold back. They do not work through the question or topic list routinely, but listen carefully to the story. If a topic comes up naturally without asking a question, it will not be repeated, unless the interviewer is looking for additional information. This manner of working requires a lot of concentration of the interviewer. They need to remember what was said, so that they can come back to a topic that they need more information on in a natural manner at a later point. To do so, the interviewer can write down short notes for this.

Whether an interviewer is a good listener or not becomes clear from the quality of the interview. There could be missed or unseized opportunities. There are moments during the interview in which the respondent seems to be more into their story than usual, and it almost looks like they are talking to themselves. During these moments it is important to visibly listen. A good interviewer will keep the respondent in this situation for as long as possible by making the right remarks and asking short, elaborating questions.

Although the ability to listen well is partially a personality trait, it can be trained. However, it is recommended to select interviewers on their ability to listen.

## Emotions during the interview

Telling a life story is often connected to emotions. Sometimes respondents need to stop the interview because the subject makes them too emotional. In such situations, the interviewer should offer the respondent time and space, so they can recover without interpreting this action as indifference. As mentioned before, empathy is needed in situations like this, but without too much interference from the interviewer or excessively going along with the emotions shown.

During the training examples of such moments should be shown. Moments like this cannot be simulated to practice them. Intervention moments during the execution of the project are a good manner to discuss the cases (with video and audio material). The fieldworkers can also learn a lot from each other at this point. Organizing meetings and discussing experiences with each other supported by the project organisations are encouraging and important within oral history projects.

## Interventions during the interview by the interviewer

The most difficult part of an interview is to decide upon the right moments of intervention. Each intervention will interrupt the respondent's story. The intervention should therefore be very functional. For example, if a respondent loses track of the story, or gets stuck on a certain subject for too long, the interviewer can steer the interview back to the main topic by using a follow up question. A follow up question can increase the quality of the interview and does not need to be interrupted if the timing is right. Too many interventions or talking along can be distracting and lead to irritation of the respondent or the person watching the interview later.

There are different types of interventions one should not use:

- 1) The first type is a denying type of intervention. In this case, the interviewer reacts to something the respondent says with denial. This could be verbally or non-verbally. Denial of something someone is telling could lead to a discussion in which the ideas of the fieldworker are added to the content of an interview. This should not happen. The possibility of contrasting political views between the respondent and the fieldworker can be a clear risk, therefore this should be pointed out during the training. In the end it is of course not about the truth of the information, but about the experiences of the respondents, regardless of the content of these. Attention to this point will have a positive effect

on the quality of the interviews. The interviewers should not offer their own opinion during an interview.

2) Another undesired type of intervention is too much affirmation. In general, there is nothing wrong with the use of words like: indeed, yes, okay, I see, and so on, with which the interviewer lets the respondent know that “it is going well”. But if it happens too often and with too much emphasis, it is very annoying for the listener of the interview, since they are constantly reminded that the interviewer is present. The quality of the recorded interview therefore decreases. Repeating or restating the words of the interviewee, without a functional reason or added value, is not advisable.

Sometimes the interview needs to be steered to make sure that the topics are discussed sufficiently. The most suitable method for this is asking a question that is related to the intended topic and the subject that the respondent is talking about at that moment (making a connection).

In the end, oral history interviewing means that an interviewer needs to unlearn things rather than learning new things. With this, we are referring to many behaviours that we normally have, such as having an opinion, participation in a conversation, repeating what was said in a rhetorical context, and many other often subconscious habits. This should be practised a lot. However, not everyone will manage to unlearn these behaviours successfully. Some habits seemed to be incredibly persistent. Therefore, it is advisable to add extra moments of reflection for the interviewers who need this within the project.

## Privacy

The respondents like to know what happens to the content of the interview. This is why information is provided beforehand about the privacy and the manner in which it is safeguarded within the project. Sometimes people tell us special events or secrets that they have not told anyone before during this interview. This is why it is advisable to make clear written agreements about the use of the material before and after the interview. After concluding the interview, even if the respondent generally does not mind sharing the information, it should be checked if there are any sensitive subjects that the respondent would rather not share publicly, or at least not at that moment. Written agreements can be made about this.

At the end of the interview, the interviewee needs to sign the consent form. We created an example ‘consent form’ for the oral history interviews of Specially Unknown (See appendix IV). Theoretically, people are not given any transcriptions. The video material should also not be given to anyone other than the person themselves (so not their children, etc.). If someone explicitly asks, you can decide to give that person the video material. But one should indicate that these files are very large, and that uploading takes several hours.

## A pleasant closure

A pleasant closure of the interview will make the respondent feel like the interview was important and that they have contributed to the objectives of the project. This also shows the interviewer is interested and involved.

Three tips to end the interview:

1. The fieldworker says that they believe that all subjects have been discussed, and asks if the respondent would like to add anything. This type of conclusion will work, because it provides the opportunity to bring up things that have not been discussed yet, because the respondent is able to conclude the interview themselves.

2. The interviewer can end the interview by summing up what he/she found characteristic, special, moving and touching about the interview. Then the fieldworker could complement the respondent for sharing his story. In general this will lead to a pleasant ending of the interview.
3. In case the oral history project has a formulated research question, the fieldworker could end the interview by giving a short summary of what they think is relevant in the context of the research. Then the fieldworker asks the respondent if they agree with this. (In this case, the fieldworker should really be able to provide a worthy summary that does justice to the interview. If this is not the case, the fieldworker risks not being taken seriously by the respondent and listeners).

### 3. Metadata, transcription and audio-visual technique

No matter how well an interview is carried out, it is only useful from an oral history perspective, if it is also available for research and made (digitally) searchable.

On top of this, terms such as metadata and transcription and the quality of video and audio of the recordings are important.

Please make use of appendices:

I. Workflow for interview

II. Workflow camera and audio

III. Example metadata

IV. Consent form

V. Guideline for transcribing

#### Complete and reliable metadata

Metadata is data that record the entire process of an interview from the first contact with the respondent up to the coding of an interview. Filling out metadata is therefore an accurate administrative task, which is essential for making an interview accessible. Besides the usual NAP (name, address, place of residence) information, the data from preparatory interviews and any details are recorded. The description of the setting of the interview, time and place of the interview, details during the interview, a summary of the interview, any codes of topics, and copies of relevant documents are all included in the metadata. In appendix III of this manual, the metadata form of project Specially Unknown is added as an example.

Metadata is therefore a process that should be updated systematically from the start. Filling out metadata requires discipline. Experience shows that filling out the metadata afterwards costs a lot of time and effort, and that the result is less accurate.

#### Presence of transcription

Transcription is the literal written script of an interview. Many researchers and historians work with these. A written script is easier and faster to search through than surfing back and forth through the visual recording. For some purposes, even sounds such as 'erm' and 'eh' are also transcribed. These sounds provide the setting of an interview as accurate as possible, and provide information about hesitation, emotions, etc. For the project Specially Unknown it is decided to not always transcribe these sounds, because a direct connection exists between the (pieces of) transcriptions and video recordings. For the transcriptions, special subtitling software 'Subtitle edit' can be used to produce a continuous transcription with an easy conversion. Learning to use this software is an important point of attention during the oral history training and the test interview.

For the accuracy of the transcriptions it is necessary to get a third party (person) to control the transcriptions. Transcribing as well as checking transcriptions and coding of the transcriptions take a lot of time, which should be kept in mind in the planning of a project.

#### Good facility of the audio-visual devices

Another important competence of the interviewer is using the video camera and microphone for the audio recording. There are interviewers that have assistants for audio and video recording. For the project Specially Unknown, the decision to let one person handle both the interview and the recording was made due to the necessary confidential relationship between the interviewer and interviewee.

Besides this the project focuses on creating source material, and not material for a documentary or television broadcast.

It is recommended to use the provided workflow for camera and audio (see appendix II). Recording an interview, and being in charge of the content of it at the same time, requires extra focus and attention. Is the battery working properly? Is the audio being recorded properly? Is the respondent in focus? Is the non-verbal communication recorded properly? Nothing is more annoying than realising that the audio or video quality is not sufficiently halfway through the interview.

For oral history interview the camera is static, there are no close ups or changes of position. There is also no editing of the recordings. An annoying background, dark recordings, recordings with too much distance, insufficient audio quality (sometimes the voice of the interviewer is loud compared to the voice of the respondent), and sometimes, blurry video recordings. Of course it is predictable and logical that such differences in quality will occur. Not everyone has the same experience, and fieldworkers have to do everything by themselves, the interview as well as the recording. For this, interim intervention and coaching is also needed.

*The choice of recording device should be made in time before the training. Not all video cameras provide the desired video quality, or have batteries that last long enough. Furthermore, technical developments are changing rapidly. When purchasing devices, make sure with the requirements of organisations that will store and keep the material.*

## 4. Interview method and refugees

Although refugees are definitely no homogeneous group, and the differences between them are significant, a number of common traits can be found. Based on the experiences with the Dutch oral history project *Ongekend Bijzonder*, we will indicate a number of traits below that turned out to be essential for the interviews in hindsight.

### Trust

Refugees often need to participate in interviews and make statements during their journey. Justice officials, solicitors, refugee aid workers and related organisations, and sometimes local and top-level media, are all interested in the lives of refugees for their own reasons. Participating in these interviews often has an obligatory nature.

This makes many refugees reluctant when they are asked to participate in an interview. Because of their personal experiences, they can be suspicious and mistrusting towards those who want to interview them. The lack of trust in this group is not only connected to unpleasant past experiences, but also to fear of possible effects of the interview, for example for family members who were left behind, or with regard to the possible return to their country of origin.

These elements make it necessary for the interviewer to make a bigger effort than usual during the preparatory interview. Creating trust is essential. Participating with the interview with suspicion and mistrust is not beneficial for the quality of it.

Sometimes it is better to not conduct an interview if the respondent is too mistrusting than to continue it anyway and hope that the mistrust will disappear. But the latter is something that happens often. From the results of *Ongekend Bijzonder* it becomes clear that many respondents who are mistrusting at the start, have a change of attitude during the interview. Trust grows during the interview, so to say. This means that investing more in the preparatory interview has a definite positive effect.

### Fear

One of the most important reasons why respondents with a refugee background are sometimes mistrusting towards an interview request, and sometimes also towards the interviewer, is fear. What happens with my interview? Who will watch my interview? Is the interviewer reliable? How do I know for sure that they do not work for the regime of my home country? How do I know for sure that they do not work for Justice department or the Immigration Service? How do I know for sure that they will not pass on my stories? Refugee communities are reasonably small groups and members of groups that often know each other. Generally, people do not want their stories to be known by others of these groups.

Of course, the fear for consequences is also connected to the regime of the home country. We noticed that refugees from countries with a dictatorship in power, such as Syria and Eritrea, this problem is more prevalent than for people who are from countries where the old totalitarian regime has left, or those that have a milder regime.

During the preparatory discussion, the fieldworker should pay a lot of attention to:

- Elaborately discussing the targets of the projects and the privacy procedures with the respondent.
- Offering the respondent a choice of picking another interviewer if they do not feel completely comfortable with the interviewer.
- Offering the respondent the opportunity to cancel the interview.

- Cancelling the interview if the interviewer feels like the respondent does not trust them sufficiently or remains fearful.
- Point out to the respondent that parts of the interview should not be used if that could put them in a dangerous position.

## Politics

Reasons for refugees to seek refuge.

- (civil) war and extreme generally unsafe situations
- Lack of freedom of speech
- Lack of freedom of control of their own life
- Lack of freedom of body and mind
- Lack of possibilities of personal growth
- Lack of the most basic necessities such as food and shelter

Without wanting to discuss these reasons more elaborately, and describing connections between them, we can conclude that all these reasons are connected to the political context that people live in. A political context that is sometimes local, and sometimes international. Refugees from former Yugoslavia, mainly left due to the war. This is also the case for Somalians. However, these wars are caused by the local political turbulence. Refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq left due to war as well as the lack of basic human rights. Refugees from Iran, Eritrea and Chile left because of the lack of basic freedoms. In the eighties of the previous century, the Eritreans sought refuge because of civil war as well. This also applies to some Iranians that left the country during the war with Iraq.

Politics are therefore a very prominent part of the life of refugees, even when the person is not a direct political refugee.

During the interview, people tend to dwell on this aspect of the life story. Sometimes, the interview turns into an actual history lesson if the interviewer does not intervene. Although this political historic considerations is very interesting and educational, they are not an extra important subject of an interview focussed on the life story.

If this is the case during an interview, the interviewer is expected to use smart interventions to lead the conversation back to the core. For example, if someone wants to pay too much attention to the description of different Marxist subcultures within the leftist movement in Iran at the start of the eighties of last century, the interviewer should look for emotional connections between the respondent and that specific moment in Iranian history, and with that, limit the sociological and historical descriptions. This requires knowledge of Iran as well as the situation of Iranian refugees in the country of arrival. An important underlying question that the interviewer should ask themselves during the interview, is why the respondent feels like talking about this analysis. The answer to that question is the key to changing the subject of the conversation.

## Opportunity to speak

Refugees are usually people with a lot of emotional baggage. They have been through a lot, and have experienced a lot of injustice. They have a lot of stories about themselves and people they have known. Once they are past the fear and hesitation, they generally want to tell many untold stories. Although talkativeness differs from one culture to another, many respondents seem to have a lot to tell once they feel safe. Sometimes, they think of such interviews as an affirmation of their suffering and experiences from the past. These stories are strong and have a lot of content. They vary from telling the life story of others to describing situations which they and others were in at some point. Often they think the stories of others are more interesting than their own. If one of their friends or acquaintances died during the war or in prison, they feel shame that they are still alive themselves. This is why some interviewees think that the stories of victims have priority over their own life story.

The political orientation of refugees almost always leads to a political description and judgemental of the country of arrival. Sometimes they approach their direct surroundings here and now from an intellectual point of view. This is often a mechanism that people use to deal with the impossible. Although this is understandable, they are traps that the interviewer can fall for when they provide the respondent with all the freedom to keep talking about this, without making a specific connection to the personal life story of the interviewee. In hindsight, it will become clear that the interview barely has any meaning at all.

### Cultural features and taboos

Some refugees from countries in which the situation remains unchanged since they have sought refuge, or is even deteriorated, have a more difficult time to take part in an interview or tell certain parts of their story. But there are other reasons why people are more or less talkative. Cultural factors also play a role. Iranians, for example, are much more talkative than Eritreans, although both groups were confronted with a dictatorship. This is also the case for, for example, the Congolese, who are much less talkative than the Afghans. It turns out that some cultures are much more introverted than others, and that this influences the ability of people to talk about themselves. In some cultures, it is very impolite to talk about personal matters such as sexuality or sexual preference, or to ask elders questions, let alone contradict them. Religion also plays a role in this. Somalians barely speak about sexual preferences and experiences. This does not mean that the subject has no role in individual life stories. They just do not talk about it. Ethiopians rather do not speak about death. As soon as that subject comes up, they quickly change the subject.

Knowing that the statements above are very generalising, and possibly not based on scientific arguments, it is necessary to keep these in mind. Not just to be able to make a good estimation about respondents, and to know why they avoid certain topics, but also because fieldworkers (if they have a refugee background) themselves are from these countries. In this case there is a chance that the fieldworker and respondent find it normal not to speak about a certain subject, and that entire topic remains untouched because of that.

This problem could be solved by proposing to have another interviewer conduct the interview who is not part of the chosen ethnic groups. For an interviewer who does not know the cultural context, it is easier to keep asking questions. However, a fieldworker from their own community often feels safer, and is better for the implementation of the project within that community.

### Inappropriate and embarrassing

Every culture has matters that are experienced as inappropriate and embarrassing. In the Netherlands, we think it is inappropriate to ask how much someone earns, and showing excessive emotions in public when this is not acceptable as embarrassing. Different cultures have different standards for what is embarrassing and inappropriate. Private questions of strange men to women can be experienced as inappropriate. This is also the case for negative statements about someone who they should actually be grateful of. Some refugees are generally grateful for the opportunities given by society. They want to do something in return. They are also far less critical about the current affairs of society than other groups. That does not mean that they do not experience this. If the question is formulated differently, the critical remarks are very much there. One often needs to change the questions, and possibly the topics, regarding possible inappropriate and embarrassing subjects. Sometimes it is better if the interviewer has the same gender, or not the same nationality.

Not only for conducting interviews, but also for analysing the material it is important to keep the aforementioned aspects into account, that do not only apply to refugees, but also to most migrants. It would be an interesting question for the further analysis of such oral history material to see how much more or less certain topics are discussed by certain groups.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The oral history material from the project Specially Unknown EU can be used for many (research) purposes. Based on the material, many hypotheses can be created about the factors that are deciding for the integration of refugees into European cities and society.

One of the questions that would be interesting to answer is about the relationship between 'identity' and 'place' in a world that is globalising and localising at the same time based on the interviews. The term diaspora can be of use for this. In its most original meaning, this term refers to the formation of communities with shared longings for 'roots' and all memories and experiences that are connected to the migration, whether it was forced or not. Maintaining social, economical, political, and cultural relationships with the home country is also part of this.

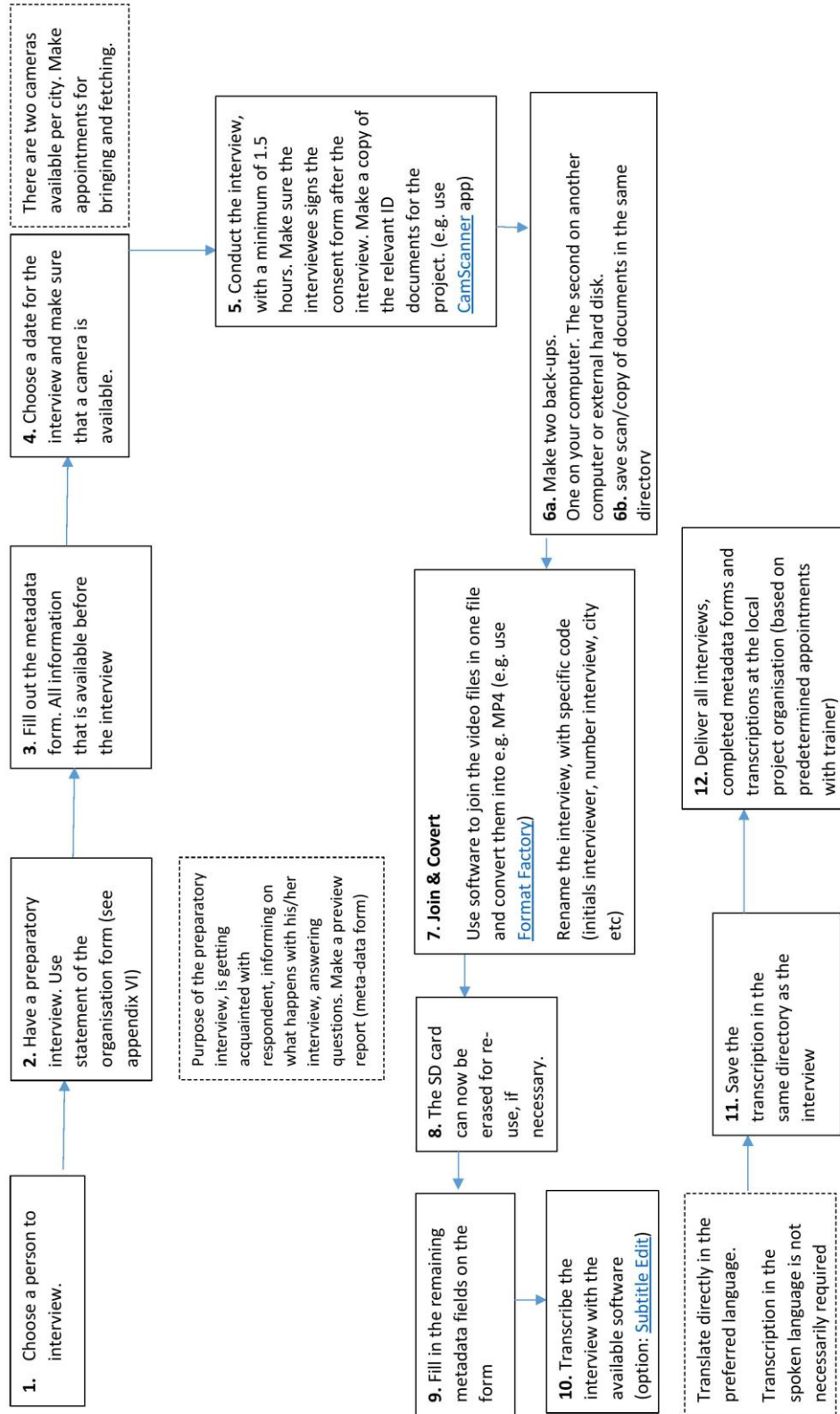
Many aspects of the term diaspora can be found in the interviews. The surroundings that people end up in, and that people become part of, also play a role in this. Being an Iranian in Antwerp or Paris makes a difference. In different cities, different types of community building and interaction with the surroundings within the same groups of refugees were created. At the same time, cultural backgrounds, reasons to seek refuge, and the social backgrounds of people are all part of the personal experience of identity, the location and the connection between those.

Identity becomes a more and more complex term in current large cities in the western world. The projects aim is that the Specially Unknown EU oral history interviews will offer extra perspectives for explaining this term in a context of globalisation, mobility, and technological developments.

The number of interesting topics will grow during the time the interviews take place. They contain much more information than expected. The project hopes that researchers of different disciplines will be able to find more in-depth answers to this question and others.

# Appendix

## I. Workflow for interview



## Appendix

### II. Workflow for camera and audio

#### Equipment

- Video camera full HD
- Attachment microphone + cable
- Tripod
- Spare battery for microphone (9 Volt – code: 6LR61)
- Main power supply
- SD card 64 GB 10 (2 per city)
- Headphones [optional]
- Battery tester [optional]
- Extension cord [if necessary]

#### The interview (technical):

##### On location

1. Set up the tripod (Adjust the legs, check the levels)
2. Take camera + attachment microphone
3. Attach microphone on top of the camera to the hot shoe and screw it on to tighten. Plug the cord into camera where it says "MIC PLUG IN POWER"
4. Insert SD card at the bottom of the camera
5. Place camera + microphone on tripod (on horizontal level on the camera attachment)
6. Connect the camera to the main power supply (if necessary with extension cable)
7. Set up tripod + camera
  - Distance to the interviewee about 1.5 meters
  - Set up the camera to the right next to the interviewer so that LCD monitor is still visible for the interviewer. If you want to sit closer to the interviewee, then rotate the LCD-monitor 180° and put the monitor back to the body of the camera
  - Keep the camera on eye level of the respondent
  - Zoom in for an ideal frame - ensure adequate head and arm space and background
  - Do not zoom in and out during the interview
8. Turn the microphone on (lights up green)
9. Record a test video
10. Control test video (with headphones for audio control)
11. Start recording - start interview
12. Red light camera goes on indicating recording - check this a number of times and make sure the scene counter is running (displays the elapsed time of the video).
13. Stop recording
14. Turn off the microphone
15. Dismantle the camera, microphone and tripod

##### Home

16. Upload SD card on your own computer
17. Make a second back-up on another computer or external hard disk
18. Use software to join the video files in one file and convert them into MP4
19. Rename the interview, with specific code (initials interviewer, number interview, city etc).
20. Transcribe the interview with the available software (e.g. Subtitle Edit)
21. Save the subtitle file \*.srt in the same directory as the interview file

## Appendix

### III. Example metadata

#### Respondent

- Ethnicity / home country
- Nationality
- Place of birth and date
- Gender
- Place of residence
- Manner of recruitment
- Education
- Civil status
- Children
- Work / activity

#### Interviewer

- Interviewer ID
- Name interviewer
- Place of birth and date
- Gender
- Education
- Profession / professional background

#### Interview

- Interview ID
- Date, time and location
- Language used
- Status (unedited, edited, transcribed, degree of allowable disclosure)
- Size format
- Details, circumstances in which the interview was conducted.
- Summary of every 10 minutes in topics
- Explanation of abbreviations, jargon, geographical names and proper names

#### Add list of used documents

*(Should be adjusted to the requirement of the project organisation)*

- Statement of the project organisation, see appendix VI (obliged)
- Consent form interviews, see appendix V.
- Copy or scan of ID Interviewee
- Others..,

# Appendix IV.

## EXAMPLE

### Consent form oral history interviews Specially Unknown / Participants administration\*

Interviewer: ..... Interview date: ...../...../..... Place: .....

#### Interviewee (participant information)

First Name : ..... Surname: ..... (M / F)

Date of birth : .....

Address : ..... Postal code:.....

Place : ..... Country:.....

Telephone / Mobile phone:..... Email:.....

ID number respondent:.....Type ID document:.....

[Please enclose a copy or scan of the front and back of the ID document]

**\*The personal data above are only for administrative use within the project and will not be distributed to any third party.**

#### Consent declaration for use of interview transcription and video

\*Interviewee .....[name respondent] hereby gives permission for:

- The deposit of recordings and cataloguing of his/her interview for an unlimited period in the digital database of.....[name of archive / digital database] and the digital database and project archive of Specially Unknown EU in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation
- Use of the interview material in the context of the project Specially Unknown EU (website, exhibition, conference, seminar, etc.).
- The public dissemination of the recordings in scientific, cultural or educational events as part of the activities of .....[name project organisation].
- Use of the interview material for further research by scientists and researchers from the digital database.
- Excluding the interview fragment(s) specified below (as far as relevant):

The interviewee gives his/her explicit consent to process the below mentioned special category of personal data:

Place of birth: ..... Country of birth: .....

Signature /  
Initials  
interviewee

## Appendix IV

The responsible organisation to which the interviewee can turn for his/her

- right to information
- right of access
- right of rectification
- right to be forgotten
- right to processing restrictions
- right to withdraw consent

for the local database is:

[name project organisation Red Star Line / Génériques / Rete Italiana / LWL Industriemuseum]

[name]

[address]

[e-mail]

[telephone number]

The responsible organisation to which the interviewee can turn for his/her rights  
for the European database is:

Stichting BMP  
Asterweg 19 C7  
1031 HL Amsterdam  
The Netherlands  
info@stichtingbmp.nl  
00 33 20 4 28 27 28

Place \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Signature interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_



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Asylum, Migration and  
Integration Fund

## Appendix

### V Guideline for transcribing<sup>1</sup>

Transcribing oral histories is not an easy task. To beginners it seems like a straightforward task, but it doesn't take long to discover how different the spoken language is from the written language.

Trying to translate the former into the latter is a messy business. Individuals bring their own background and experience to interviews and thus their own unique way of putting together words and sounds to get across what they want to say. Each interview presents a new set of challenges for the transcriber and editor.

#### GENERAL GUIDELINES

##### Spelling

Use the spell-checking function in Subtitle Edit. It is an important and useful first step in checking a transcript, and it can help alert you to words that need checking in the dictionary. However, there are many kinds of errors it does not catch, and there is no substitute for careful, thoughtful proofreading.

Check the Word List Interviewers sometimes make word lists—lists of words and names spoken in the course of their interviews which may not be familiar to everyone, or which may be unclear on the recording. When you begin working with a new recording, look in the Notes and Correspondence file labeled with the interviewee's name, or in the corresponding folder on the server, for a word list. Refer to the list as you transcribe or edit.

#### STYLE GUIDE

##### ABBREVIATIONS

In general, avoid abbreviation in oral history transcripts.

Do not abbreviate:

- *okay*
- *et cetera*
- names of countries, territories, provinces, states, or counties
- *doctor* when used without an accompanying name
- *Senator, Judge, Bishop, General, Professor, Brother*, or any other political, academic, civic, judicial, religious, or military title when it is used alone or when it precedes a surname alone; e.g., Professor Sloan.
- *the Reverend* or *the Honorable*, when the is part of the title preceding the name; e.g., the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.
- books of the Bible
- names of the months and days
- terms of dimension, measurement, weight, degree, depth, et cetera: inch, foot, mile
- parts of a book: Chapter 3 Section A Table 7
- word elements of addresses used in text: Avenue, Building, North, South
- portions of company names, unless the actual company name uses an abbreviation: Brother, Brothers, Company, Corporation, Incorporated, Limited, Railroad
- Senior or Junior when following partial names: Mr. Miller, Junior Mr. Toland, Senior (See below for times when the abbreviation should be used.)

##### ADDED MATERIAL—BRACKETS

Brackets [ ] are reserved for the use of editors for notes and words not present on the recording and added to the transcript. The interview participants may add notes or clarifications, as well, and these will appear between brackets in the final version of the transcript.

##### CAPITALIZATION

- As a rule of thumb, when in doubt, do not capitalize.

Do capitalize:

- names of particular persons, places, organizations, historical time periods, historical events, biblical events and concepts, movements, calendar terms referring to specific days, months, and oriental years

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Style Guide: A Quick Reference for Editing Oral History Transcripts, Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

- titles of creative works
- references to athletic, national, political, regional, religious, and social groups: Baylor Bears, Congress, Democrats, Daughters of the American Revolution, the Masons

Don't capitalize:

- *web, website, or the net*
- Can you recommend a website where I can learn more about making quilts?
- *oh*, except at the beginning of a sentence or response
- incomplete titles of persons
- seasons fall semester, spring of 2000, winter solstice
- names of dances, but do capitalize names of dancing events:  
They danced the jitterbug all night long. He invited her to the Cattle Baron's Ball.
- pronouns referring to deities:  
God in his mercy kept my child safe.  
There may be some occasions when this rule needs bending in deference to strongly held preferences of interview participants.

#### COMMAS

No sir.

Oh yes.

Thanks, Mrs. Pool.

Yeah, that's right. (Note correct spelling of *yeah*.)

Well, I'm from California originally, see.

Well now, that just doesn't make any sense.

I was born, let's see, in Dallas, Texas, in 1904.

I mean, what are you going to do about it?

So we, you know, went back home.

And, of course, we were pretty angry.

She was, like, my best friend.

Every, say, twice a month he would come by the store.

But, I don't know, it was just a really hard time for everyone.

They considered me a, quote, conservative.

The word *now* is a tricky case, since it can be used as an introductory expression, such as *well*, or to indicate the present time. We typically use a comma in the former sense and not the latter, in an attempt, perhaps in vain, to avoid confusion.

Now, that was a pretty stupid thing to do.

After all this time, why are you saying that now?

Do not place a comma after a conjunction that begins the sentence.

And the committee voted in favor of the amendment.

But the decision came as a complete surprise to Bob.

When the conjunction precedes a transitional element, use a comma before and after the transitional element or none at all.

But, in my opinion, the lamp looked better on the end table.

And in the evening the skies darkened.

#### CRUTCH WORDS

Spell common crutch words as follows:

uh, uh-huh, um-hm, unh-uh

#### DATES. See also NUMBERS

In the transcript, the form of dates conforms to the rules for numbers:

- Use numerals for years (1996)
- Use numerals for days when they follow the name of the month and precede the year; follow this form even when the speaker says, "Today is August the fifth, nineteen eighty-seven." Today is August 5, 1987.

- Spell out the words for the day when the year is not expressed and the speaker uses the ordinal number:  
My birthday is August fifth.  
My birthday is August the fifth.
- Spell out the word for the day when the day precedes the month:  
the fifth of August
- Other examples:  
1930s; the thirties; 1989 or '90; midsixties; mid-1960s
- When a date is said as a string of numbers, use numerals:  
He died 12/18/1973.

#### FALSE STARTS

A false start may be anything from a syllable to a sentence fragment. Repeated words, phrases, or syllables are at times indicative of a person's thought patterns, speech patterns, or personality traits, or of a speaker's effort to emphasize an element of communication. Sometimes an interviewee may be deliberately ambiguous or turgid for reasons of his or her own. Where to draw the line in deleting false-start material from the transcript is a difficult decision. We strive to follow a middle course, leaving in enough to indicate individual speech patterns. If repetition is for emphasis as reflected in the voice of the interviewee, the repetition is always retained. Do not try to indicate stuttering unless it is intentional.

#### FEEDBACK WORDS AND SOUNDS (crutch words, encouraging words, and guggles)

While there is some merit in having an absolutely verbatim transcript which includes all instances of feedback (such as *um-hm* and *yeah*), too many interruptions in the flow of a speaker's remarks make for tedious transcribing now and exhausting reading later. Knowing when to include feedback sounds and when to omit them calls for very careful judgment. Usually the interviewer's noises are intended to encourage the interviewee to keep talking. If every other line or so of the transcript consists of feedback, go back and carefully evaluate the merit of each instance. Do not include it all, especially if it interrupts the interviewee's comments in midstream. Only if the feedback is a definite response to a point being made by the interviewee should you include it. When in doubt, ask. Type no more than two crutch words per occurrence per page. Crutch words are words, syllables, or phrases of interjection designating hesitation and are characteristically used instead of pauses to allow thinking time for the speaker. They also may be used to elicit supportive feedback or simple response from the listener, such as: you know, see? or, understand?

- Use of *uh*: The most common word used as a crutch word is *uh*.
- When *uh* is used by the narrator as a stalling device or a significant pause, then type *uh*. But sometimes a person will repeatedly enunciate words ending with a hard consonant with an added "uh," as in *and-uh*, *at-uh*, *did-uh*, *that-uh*, *in-uh*. Other examples are *to-uh*, *of-uh*, *they-uh*. In these instances, do not type *uh*.

Guggles are words or syllables used to interrupt, foreshorten, or end responses, and also as sounds of encouragement. Guggles are short sounds, often staccato, uttered by the interviewer to signal his desire to communicate. They may be initial syllables of words or merely *oh*, *uh*, *ah*, or *er*. Spelling of specific guggles:

- Agreement or affirmation: *uh-huh*, *um-hm*
- Disagreement: *unh-uh*

#### GRADES, SCHOLASTIC

Type letter grades in capital letters with no periods following, no italics, and no quotation marks. Show number grades in Arabic numerals with no quotation marks and no following periods. The plural should be formed only by adding *s*, except where confusion with another word is possible.

I made all A's by earning 100s on all my exams, but my roommate made only Bs.

#### INCOMPLETE SENTENCES

Incomplete sentences are familiar occurrences in oral history because of its conversational nature. They are best ended with an em dash (—) or three points without brackets ...

#### NUMBERS

In general, spell out whole numbers, whether cardinal or ordinal, from one to ninety-nine, and any of those numbers followed by hundred, thousand, hundred thousand, million, and so on, hyphenated or not.

sixty-nine  
seventy-fifth

twenty-two hundred, but 2,367. Note: When there are several numbers in a sentence or a group of numbers includes numbers over one hundred, you may use numerals for brevity and consistency.

- Always spell out the number if it is the first word in a sentence.  
When were you born? Nineteen sixty-five.  
When were you born? In 1965.
- Spell out the number if it is the name of a street and under one hundred. 454 Fourth Street
- Spell out decades such as fifties, sixties, but 1960s, 1970s.

Do not spell out:

- stats  
And then that year we wound up going 34 and 2.
- percentages or angles  
Only 45 percent of board members approved of the measure.  
Her foot was turned at a 45-degree angle.
- street address numbers, intrabuilding numbers, highway numbers  
10 Downing Street  
304 Carroll Library  
IH35
- telephone numbers
  - Our phone number was Plaza, which is 75—it was Plaza 36293.
- fractional sums of money above one dollar: \$2.98
- dates
  - 735 BC
  - mid-1950s
  - AD 1066
  - the midfifties
  - 1990s
  - midfifties fashions
  - 24 February 1997
  - July 1997 (no comma)
- time of day—Spell out even, half, and quarter hours. Use numerals for other fractions of time, or when a.m. or p.m. follows:
  - 8:20
  - four o'clock
  - three forty-five
  - 6:30 p.m.
  - seven thirty
  - six in the morning
- number elements in names of government bodies and subdivisions of 100th and higher, all union locals and lodges  
Thirty-Sixth Infantry  
139th Tactical Wing
- parts of a book, such as chapter numbers, verse numbers  
For consistency, any sentence which contains numerals pertaining to the same category should have all numerals. The report stated that 7 [instead of seven] out of 265 students voted in the campus elections.  
Exceptions:
  - The sentence begins with a number:  
Seven out of 265 students voted.
  - Numbers representing different categories:  
In the past ten years five new buildings of over 125 stories were erected in the city.

Numbers as numbers:

When spoken of or referred to as numbers, they may be enclosed in quotation marks or italicized; either is acceptable, but be consistent throughout the transcript.

Plurals of numbers:

- Spelled-out numbers form plurals like any other noun: the twenties and thirties

- Numerals form plurals by adding *s* alone, with no apostrophe: 1920s and 1930s
- When connecting figures with a prefix or suffix, add the hyphen in the appropriate place if the compound word is adjectival. Connect numbers expressed in words to a prefix or suffix with a hyphen:  
twenty-odd  
The suffix *fold* is an exception:  
threefold

#### PLURALS. See also NUMBERS

- Compound words formed with prepositions are pluralized by forming the plurals of the first nouns in the compounds  
fathers-in-law
- Capital letters of the alphabet are pluralized by adding *s* or *'s*:  
Zs  
Use the apostrophe only where confusion is possible:  
A's, not As  
Lowercase letters form the plural by adding *'s*:  
p's and q's
- Foreign words are made plural, unless Americanized, according to the customs proper to the particular languages. For example, in Hebrew, the plural of *Kibbutz* is formed by adding *im*: *Kibbutzim*.
- Abbreviations are pluralized by adding *s* when in the form of acronyms, initialisms, or reverse acronyms without periods  
GREs  
When periods are used, add an apostrophe:  
B. K.'s
- Proper nouns: In most cases, add an *s* to the singular:  
six King Georges  
Add *es* to the singular form if the word ends in *s* or *z*:  
six King Charleses, the Martinezes  
More examples:  
The three Loises are friends with the three Marys.  
The hall was full of Joneses and Martins.  
Note that the apostrophe is *never* used to denote the plural of a personal name.

#### POSSESSIVES

- Follow the standard rules for possessives.
- For proper nouns, add *'s* to most, even those ending with an *s*:  
Charlie's, Frances's  
However: Jesus' and Moses'  
For plural possessives, the apostrophe goes at the end:  
The Smiths' and Reynoldses' fortunes were lost in the Depression.  
We're planning on going to the boys' basketball game tonight.  
Collective nouns are exceptions:  
children's toys, women's clothes

#### QUOTATION MARKS

- When a direct expression is spoken by one person (*I*, *he*, *she*), set apart the expression with commas, use opening and closing quotation marks, and capitalize the first letter of the first word quoted.  
She said, "I am going to graduate in May."
- When a direct expression is spoken by more than one person (*we*, *they*), do not use quotation marks, but do set apart the expression with commas and do capitalize the first letter of the first word quoted.  
They said, What are you doing here?
- When a thought is quoted, do not use quotation marks, but do set the thought apart by commas and capitalize the first letter of the first word quoted.  
I thought, Where am I?

- \*Note: When a person repeatedly breaks up recreated dialogue, whether internal or external, with phrases such as *I said, she said, I told him, I thought*, etc., it is permissible to leave some of them out. Compare these two versions of the same passage:  
I said, "No." I said, "I'm done." I said, "I'm just waiting to retire."  
I said, "No, I'm done. I'm just waiting to retire."
- When a specific word or phrase said during the interview is referred to, enclose it in quotation marks, unless doing so adds confusion or unintended meaning to the passage: When did you retire? I shouldn't say "retire," but when did you stop full-time pastoring?
- Enclose in quotation marks when text refers to
  - titles of articles in periodicals
  - book chapter titles
  - book divisions other than chapter titles: sections, paragraphs, charts, and other labeled book parts
  - dissertation titles
  - essay titles
  - newspaper headlines (in all capital letters)
  - poems (short, not book length)
  - radio program titles
  - sermon titles
  - short musical composition titles when not designated by number
  - song titles
  - short story titles
  - television program titles
  - theses (unpublished)
  - lecture titles
  - titles of formal courses of study
  - debate topics

Use single quotes for titles or quotes within titles or quotes:

- He said, "Get that Benny Bolton record of 'South.'"

Do not enclose in quotation marks

- thoughts or paraphrases:  
I thought to myself, Who does she think she is?
- the word *yes* or the word *no* other than in a sentence which includes other direct discourse:  
He couldn't say no, yet he didn't really want to say yes.  
She said, "No," when asked, "Do you care to join us?"
- names used in conjunction with the words *called*, *named*, or words with similar meanings:  
We named the dog Bowser.  
My father never called me Junior. He had a nickname, Rabbit, and called me Rabbit or Rab.
- words following the phrase *so-called*, whether meant in irony or not, unless they're not found in the dictionary or are used in nontraditional ways:  
That person will get the benefit of the so-called law first.  
We found out we had been transferred from being so-called combat troops to service troops.  
The Institute for Oral History uses a so-called "down" style of capitalization.
- words following the word *called* or *named*, unless they're not found in the dictionary:  
Before refrigerators we had something called an icebox.  
At that time they called it "hand-searching." Now they call it noodling.
- words and phrases following *quote* and *unquote*, unless they're in reference to discourse or are not found in the dictionary:  
I was a, quote, moderate.  
She said, quote, unquote, "Well, I respect your opinion, but I think you're wrong."

Punctuation with quotation marks:

- The period and the comma always stay inside the quotation marks.  
"I'm ready for lunch," she said, "but it's only ten o'clock."

- The semicolon and the colon always stay outside the quotations.  
With trepidation, she scanned “The Raven”; it was too eerie for her tastes.
- The em dash, exclamation mark, and question mark are within the quotation marks when they apply only to the quotation.  
She began to say, “In the spring of 1920—” and then remembered it was a year later.  
She began by saying, “In the spring of 1920,”—I think it was really 1921—“I graduated from Baylor and began teaching school.”

#### RECORDING TRANSITIONS

- a pause in recording, when recorder is turned off and then on again, when sound fades out, et cetera in brackets:  
[pause in recording]

#### SOUNDS IN RECORDING OTHER THAN TALKING—PARENTHESES

Nonverbal sounds or events which occur in the recording are noted and enclosed in parentheses, especially if they intrude significantly or affect the intelligibility of the recording and certainly if they provoke a response from those present. For such notations, use no capital letters, unless for proper nouns or proper adjectives, and no ending punctuation. When these occur at the end of a sentence or a clause, position them after the punctuation. Reserve the use of parentheses for such activity notes.

- Descriptive terms in brackets:  
[laughs] when speaker laughs  
[Jones laughs] when person other than speaker laughs  
[laughter] or [both laugh] when more than one laughs  
[unintelligible]  
[telephone rings]  
[knock at the door]
- Avoid editorializing. Use [both talking at once] or [speaking at same time]—NOT [interrupts]; use [laughs]—NOT [laughs rudely], [giggles], [chuckles], [snickers], [guffaws], [snorts derisively].

#### SPACING

- one space after a period and after a colon
- one space between words and before and after parentheses in the middle of a sentence
- no space before or after em dashes (—)
- one space between initials in a name (e.g. J. F. Kennedy)

#### SPELLED-OUT WORDS

- When a speaker spells a word, capitalize appropriately and separate letters with hyphens: B-a-y-l-o-r
- Follow the exact words of the speaker: They called him Screech, spelled capital S-c-r-double e-c-h.

#### SPELLING PROBLEMS

- Always use the word processing software’s spell-check function before printing and always look up a word if you are not completely sure of its spelling. When the dictionary allows more than one spelling of a word, choose the first one listed.
- Always check the interview files to locate a word list for each recording. Interviewers may make lists to accompany the recording; using the lists saves time and results in a more accurate transcript. Please include the word list with the transcript when passing it on to the audit checker or the final editor.
- Spellings for slang and certain words and expressions pronounced in regional dialect are available in dictionaries or reference works in the office. Words of informal language, such as *yeah* and *yep*, may be transcribed verbatim if they occur in the dictionary. Words commonly pronounced together in spoken English—such as *gonna* (going to), *wanna* (want to), *shoulda* (should have), *coulda* (could have), *woulda* (would have), *sorta* (sort of), and *kinda* (kind of)—are in the unabridged dictionary, you have to choose if you want to spell these out.
  - In the same vein, we type “cause” as “because” but leave uses of “course” (shortened version of “of course”) as is.
- Interviewees occasionally coin words, either humorously or to convey a meaning for which they cannot find an existing word. If you cannot find a word in any dictionary but can hear it clearly and can devise a

reasonable spelling for it, transcribe it and place it in quotation marks the first time it occurs. Do not use quotation marks for every occurrence of the coined word, however, as it makes for tedious reading.

#### UNINTELLIGIBLE SPOTS IN RECORDING

- When speech on a recording is unintelligible, first play it at a higher volume and/or slower speed. Next, ask someone else to listen. Don't struggle alone.
- If you can make an educated guess, type the closest possible approximation of what you hear between brackets, and add two question marks in parentheses. I went to school in [Maryville?? or Maryfield??].
- If you and those you consult cannot make a guess as to what is said, leave a blank line of the approximate length of the unknown portion and two question marks in parentheses. We'd take our cotton to Mr. [ \_\_\_\_\_??]'s gin in Cameron. At every city council meeting, she always asked [ \_\_\_\_\_??].
- If a speaker lowers his or her voice, turns away from the microphone, or speaks over another person, it may be necessary to declare that portion of recording unintelligible. When he'd say that, we'd—[laughs; unintelligible].

#### WORD LISTS

Interviewers sometimes make word lists—lists of words and names spoken in the course of their interviews which may not be familiar to everyone. When you begin working with a new recording, look in the interviewee's Notes and Correspondence file for a word list and use it as you transcribe or edit. Add to it as you verify other words and names.

## Appendix

### VI. List of topics

Life story (topics)		Special angles (emotions)	Special angles (the city)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Object</li> <li>• Family</li> <li>• Youth</li> <li>• Upbringing</li> <li>• Dreams</li> <li>• Expectations on departure</li> <li>• Experience on arrival</li> <li>• Living / the neighbourhood</li> <li>• Social life</li> <li>• Family here</li> <li>• Work</li> <li>• Education / study</li> <li>• Major events / key moment</li> <li>• Daily life</li> <li>• Activities, Leisure</li> <li>• Performances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal development</li> <li>• Relationships with their own community</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Perception of the city</li> <li>• Contribution to the city</li> <li>• Asylum centre</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Sexuality</li> <li>• Love / relationship / marriage</li> <li>• Social criticism</li> <li>• Naturalization</li> <li>• Health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pride</li> <li>• Homesickness</li> <li>• Love</li> <li>• Disappointment</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• The waiting</li> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Passion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity / bonding city</li> <li>• To settle / take root</li> <li>• Experience urban culture</li> <li>• Experience the neighbourhood</li> </ul>

## Appendix

### VII. Statement of the project organisation [name]

*Regarding the oral history interviews of the project Specially Unknown*

(This statement form of the organisation should be handed over to the interviewee during the preparatory interview)

1. All interviews are recorded with a camera and transcribed literally.
2. The recordings are stored and given to [name archiving organisations] as source material. They are stored in a depot there.
3. The interviews are also streamed by [.....] for scientific research. This data bank can be accessed through [.....] To the researchers the interviewees will remain anonymous (they only have a code).
4. Each interviewee fills out a consent form in which this person gives permission to make the entire interview available for streaming through the data bank.
5. If there are fragments in the interview that the interviewee wishes to not make available, or in which they wish to be made unrecognisable, the interviewee can indicate this on the consent form.
6. The interviewee can also indicate that they want some sections to become available after ten or twenty years (optional).
7. Lastly, the interviewee can indicate that they only want the interview to be available for researchers registered with.....
8. Fragments of the interviews can be used for the website of the project and for the website of the archives, etc. If fragments are chosen to be placed on the website of the project or on other websites, the interviewee will first get the opportunity to watch the concerning fragment, and their permission is asked to place this on that website. It is also possible for the interviewee to be made unrecognisable for this.

Date:...../...../.....

Place:.....

Signature competent person [e.g. local project coordinator]

.....

NOTES:

**Specially Unknown EU**  
Manual for oral history interviews and transcriptions



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