

NOG



Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies

Interviews and Life Narratives

Masterclass for PhD's and RMA students

Date: **Tuesday April 29, 2014**

Time: **11.00-16.00h**

Location: **Utrecht University**

Organizer: **Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies**

Subject: This seminar discusses the various ways interviews can be useful for collecting material for gender research in the humanities and social sciences in order to produce better understanding of so far under-researched or missing topics.

Feminist ethnography has been crucial at developing interviewing and qualitative research methods in order to account for histories and experiences of disadvantaged social groups (women, working classes, ethnic groups, the disabled etc.) Depending on the nature and the goals of the research project, interviews can be tailored to serve the purpose of the researcher's investigative endeavors. They can yield narrative and topical information that may question existing notions, conceptions about certain topics and produce new insights on them. Besides producing new archives of source material, they create the need for developing new methodologies, novel ways of dealing with the material and how the researcher integrates that into existing bodies of knowledge.

Interviews are a great tool for any research that uses life narratives as - one of - its source materials. Life narratives interviewing do not focus on specific events, but the researcher invites the interviewee to tell 'her whole life'. Material collected through such interviews is extremely messy, multilayered and performative: it is a product of the interview situation with its own unique constellation of social, political and personal forces. They are, thus, 'conversational' narratives. (Grele, 2007) Each individual account exhibits contingencies and certain dynamism that is a product of several layers of interaction, prehistory, social situation of participants, their views and upbringing, and their linguistic worlds. The power dynamics of the interview situation are rarely accounted for analytically in oral histories. Grele argues that, although the democratic impulse is there and that the acknowledgement of this joint-production happens, it is very difficult to find an adequate method of analysis and representation that steers clear "between the poles of an enthusiastic populism, where the historian disappears to give voice to 'the people', and a traditional conception of 'objective' historiography, where the historian/author assumes a privileged position as interpreter of the interpretations of those he or she interviews" (Grele 1994: 1).

How are we as gender studies scholars to deal with all the different levels of information that interviews possess? How shall we look at our own roles, positions and the responsibilities it relates in producing our own account? In other words, how are we to analyze and integrate this specific type of source material into larger stories? How do we put the often-voiced theoretical plea for accountable, transparently intersubjective research into actual practice?

These are crucial questions that anybody grapples with when trying to revise existing histories or ethnographies and so the class will address these important issues.

Dr. Izabella Agardi defended a dissertation based on life narratives & oral history *On the Verge of History. Rupture and Continuity in Women's Life Narratives from Hungary, Romania and Serbia* at the Gender Studies Programme of Utrecht University. Her supervisors were Prof. Bertheke Waaldijk (UU) and Dr. Andrea Peto (CEU).

The masterclass will start with an introduction by Dr. Agardi and discussion of readings. The second part will be devoted to students' and PhD's work in progress.

Participation: Participation is free and open to both beginning and experienced scholars, PhD students and research master students who want to present short papers or questions & reflections on work in progress (any format) connected to this theme.

Participants are especially invited to submit short contributions on

a) their interviews with individuals or groups and reflections & questions on grappling with the interview situation

b) methodological issues: reflections and questions on ways of writing stories of individuals or groups; the search for alternative ways of telling history in different contexts into larger narratives.

Deadline for registration: Tuesday April 22, 2014 by sending a one-page description of your possible contribution to nog@uu.nl (mentioning 'Interviews and Life Narratives' in the subject).

Participants can get a Certificate of Attendance. ECTS is possible – please contact the NOG for this *before* the masterclass starts: nog@uu.nl

Required reading:

- Devault, Marjorie and Glenda Gross. (2007) 'Feminist Interviewing: Experience, Talk, and Knowledge'. In: S. Hesse-Biber (ed.) *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Practice*. Sage publication, p. 173-197.
- Passerini, Luisa. (2007) 'Memories between Silence and Oblivion'. In: L. Passerini, *Memory and Utopia. The Primacy of Intersubjectivity*. Equinox: London, p. 15-32.
- Agardi, Izabella. (2007) 'The Work of Nostalgia. Remembering the Double Burden in Post-Socialist Rural Hungary'. In: Gro Hagemann, ed., *Redistribution and Reciprocity. Work and Welfare Reconsidered*. Pisa: Edizione Plus, p. 154-182.
- Agardi, Izabella. (2012) 'And the Story Moves on... Home and Movement in Women's Narratives'. In: I. Agardi, *On the Verge of History. Rupture and Continuity in Women's Life Narratives from Hungary, Romania and Serbia*. Dissertation at Utrecht University.

Suggested reading:

- Smith, Richard Candida. 'Ronald Grele on the Role of Theory in Oral History'. In: *The Oral History Review* (1993): 99-103.
- Grele, Ronald. (2007) 'Reflections on the Practice of Oral History'. In: *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society*, 32(4). (online available)