



Preface

What this book provides

The world's growing refugee crisis can feel daunting. And the thought of future climate change refugees joining the millions already displaced can feel even more so. The World Bank predicts that over the next 30 years alone, 143 million people will be forcibly displaced by climate change.¹ But the sheer scale of the crisis means there are - and there will be - unlimited opportunities for you to use the applied oral history skills that you'll learn in this book to help improve outcomes both for refugees and for host communities.

Across the book, you will see that applied oral history with refugees is a rapidly growing, transdisciplinary practice that is set to keep mushrooming, due to the sheer demand for it worldwide. By 'applied' oral history, we mean that our interviews are not just preserved or published: findings, insights and recommendations from them are also used to measurably improve projects and services for communities. Both inside and outside academia, aspects of this work are sometimes called *contemporary* oral history or simply oral *testimony*, as they often focus on events and experiences of the past few years or months. Contemporary oral history can also be understood as a type of 'history of the present', being captured as the present unfolds before us.²

This book is designed to be equally helpful for two audiences, namely:

- professionals or volunteers who already work in any way with refugees, and need some oral history skills to help with their work
- oral historians (experienced, fledgling or would-be, starting from scratch) who would like to use their oral history skills to help make a difference to the refugee crisis, whether locally or globally

Whichever side you're coming from, and whatever your previous level of experience, the second half of this book is a comprehensive *How To* guide that will leave you fully equipped to deliver such a project yourself. The reality is that hundreds of thousands of people worldwide are already doing just that. They have dived in, in response to the need, and are already busy with this sort of work. Across our case studies you'll see that they include, among others:

- public sector professionals and charity staff responsible for processing refugees, delivering services to them, and resettling them around the world
- community workers responsible for improving integration with host communities long-term
- ordinary people in host communities doing projects that challenge anti-refugee prejudice and assist integration
- crime prevention agencies responsible for preventing radicalization and home-grown terrorism among poorly integrated refugee communities in the future
- researchers, teachers and students of academic fields like Refugee Studies and Migration Studies

Audiences are calling out for a rigorous but accessible methodology that includes guidance on legal parameters and ethical standards for this work. Importantly, this is the only publication to date that:

- defines applied oral history with refugees *as a field*, summarizing its ethics, impacts and future potentials
- insists on, and explains, the equal necessity of doing applied oral history with host communities
- shows the cost-effective, sustainable benefits that are already being drawn from this work, from grassroots to the highest levels of policy-making

- presents innovative case studies from around the world and from the author's own work, which has been taught by government as a positive practice model
- teaches a comprehensive, step by step methodology for doing your own applied oral history with refugees or host communities, at home or abroad, and
- situates this work in a socio-political and theoretical framework for the future

This book doesn't seek to give a comprehensive survey of who and where the world's refugee populations are, nor of the conflicts that got them there. Such information is available on the website of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in further detail in UNHCR's *Statistical Yearbooks*, and in fine detail in their *Online Statistical Database* as well as on their website www.refworld.org.³ However, by the end of our opening chapter, you will have an overview of the sheer diversity of the refugee world, the work being done there, and how applied oral history is helping.

That first chapter will show you that, in terms of the backgrounds they're coming from, individual refugees are as diverse as the rest of us. It will show, for instance, the difference in likely future outcomes between a refugee who, back home, was an educated, internationally-minded professional with English as a second language – and an illiterate subsistence farm-labourer who knows little of the wider world beyond her own tribal culture.

Chapter Two will explain the two very different types of host communities – the poor in the developing world who host 85% of the world's refugees, and societies in the Western world who proportionately host very few. The chapter gives an overview of the limited though important oral history that has been done with these host communities, and explains why we'll need a lot more of it with both types of host communities in order to tackle the world refugee crisis ahead.

Chapter Three gives an accessible overview of the major waves of refugee populations in modern times, and the century-old tradition of refugee oral history that has accompanied them. You'll see the tradition's twists and turns, its methodological variations and its current surge of innovations.

Chapter Four and Five each bring you case studies from around the world, with an analytic table showing how each project differed, and the impact it had. Chapter Four examines applied oral histories with refugees, while Chapter Five looks at applied oral histories with host communities.

From there on, the rest of the book is your *How To* manual, coaching you through every detail of doing your own applied oral history project, big or small, local or international, to improve outcomes for refugees or host communities. Chapter Six gives a unique guide to some of the ethical parameters of this complex, sensitive field. Chapter Nine supplies another unique tool that can revolutionize your oral history projects by quantifying the added value they bring to communities in financial-equivalent terms. The final chapter will situate your new refugee oral history skills within the theoretical, socio-political and professional currents ahead.

But before we embark on this journey together, I want to mention my qualifications for being your guide. I've worked as an academic in social and political science, published on migration and identity, and written books of applied oral history with communities. But I've also been employed at length by government to actively involve communities in improving public policies and programs. So I have worked on both sides of the policy 'fence'. As an applied oral historian, I have listened to communities and service-users, gathering their needs and insights. And as a policy insider, I had to apply those insights in ways that measurably improved public policies and services.

Both for oral history and for policy, my work has included outreach with ethnic, migrant and refugee communities, both settled and in transit. On field-trips to the ports of northern France where refugees and illegal migrants congregate, I witnessed unaccompanied African boys aged 14 or 15 taking hideous risks over and over, flinging their bodies onto British-bound lorries that accelerated and swerved to avoid them. I watched up close the complex dance of interactions between (in that instance, kindly) border police and those utterly determined young travellers with nothing to lose.

My book *Asylum under Dreaming Spires - Refugees' Lives in Cambridge Today* presents some of my work with refugees, which was taught by government to public service officials as a positive practice model.⁴ That project provides one of our case studies in Chapter Five. The book about it is a real-life, very human account of how we, in one city, used applied oral histories to improve public policies and services around refugees in the community. One challenge I always welcomed when working for government is that you are under constant scrutiny to demonstrate how your activities genuinely benefit society in concrete ways that give value for taxpayers' money. I hope that spirit of public service pervades this book too.

My 2017 book *Practicing Oral History to Improve Public Policies and Programs* (like this present one, part of Nancy Mackay's *Practicing Oral History* series at Routledge) is a comprehensive manual that teaches how to do oral history to improve public policies or non-profit projects in any field, from elder care to land management. It gives a thorough grounding on how to apply oral testimonies to measurably improve public or non-profit services of any sort, with any end-user group. This book you are reading now meets a demand raised by the other two, namely for a step by step manual teaching how to do applied oral histories with refugees and host communities specifically, so as to improve outcomes for both.

I have never been a refugee but I did emigrate alone at 19 from my home country - then an under-developed economy - to find work in a more prosperous country and necessarily, in the foreign language spoken there. I've since spent my whole adult life working abroad as an economic migrant. The politics of my own migrations (politics of class, economics, decolonization, ethnicity and gender) twine through my written work alongside the much more dramatic migratory pressures on my refugee narrators.

At moments across this book, we will need to refer in passing to right-wing and left-wing politics, because the fate of refugees is often decided by the tug of war between those two forces (neither of which have excelled at the task in recent years). The tools that this book will give you are intended to be equally useful to any moderate person on either the right or the left of the political spectrum. Oral history has traditionally listened more to communities on the left (and my own private inclination happens to be to the moderate left). But the methods in this book can and should be applied to listen empathically to right-wing communities too, not least because they deserve to be heard. Applied oral history is capable of a deep listening that can help bridge social and political divides. Across this book you will see many exciting examples of such work being done. We'll also witness the increasing dangers of extremism in any ideology. And we'll see why the ability to really listen and engage meaningful dialogue with an increasingly right-wing populism will be so important, not only for managing the refugee crisis but for world peace in the future.

Preface – References

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1. Kanta Kumari Rigaud et al., editors, *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*. Washington DC: World Bank, 2018

2. Michael Roth, 'Foucault's 'History of the Present'', *History and Theory*, Vol 20, No 1, 1981

3. Available at www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics and www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html and www.unhcr.org/uk/statistical-yearbooks.html, respectively; accessed on 21-5-2019

4. Citations for sources already named in the text are given in the references list at the end of each chapter.