Conflict in the Caucasus: The Thomas de Waal Interviews

Translation and Interpretation of Archives in Various Media: Practices and Challenges
Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies
November 2019
Background

Journalist and Carnegie Europe senior fellow Thomas de Waal discovered in his attic a box of tapes with all the interviews he had conducted for his first two books—*Chechnya: Calamity in the Caucasus* (New York University Press, 1998) and *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York University Press, 2003).

In 2013, he approached Harriman Institute at Columbia University - one of the world's leading academic institutions devoted to Russian, Eurasian and East European studies. The Institute’s Director, Professor Alex Cooley, expressed strong interest in housing this collection at Columbia as a unique source that could enable research with new perspectives on the documented issues.
From Proposal to Project: Harriman

- Cassettes converted to wav or mp4 audio files by students. Original cassettes were returned to de Waal
- Robert H. Davis Jr., the Librarian for Russian, Eurasian & East European Studies at Columbia University, brought this collection to the attention of the Libraries Administration
- Inventory spreadsheet completed by students (83 interviews sessions, totaling close to 70 hours)
- Student (native speaker of Russian) transcribed the interviews, creating 67 transcripts of legible Russian-language interviews
From Proposal to Project: Libraries

- Deed of Gift signed and access policy decisions made
- Files uploaded from transfer drive onto Columbia server
- Files processed through Archivematica digital preservation system to create an Archival Information Package (AIP)
- Files ingested into digital repository
- Standardized structured metadata created
- Metadata uploaded to Hyacinth – CUL’s metadata editor
- Landing page created on the Columbia DLC portal.
- Finding aid and catalog record created and disseminated
Challenges: Rights and Permissions

- No formal written permissions forms with interviewees. “This is not the way things were done then (or even now, for that matter). People were at war.”
- Possible problems for interviewees and families if materials become publicly available.

Access in the Reading Room only. Permission of the Head of Harriman Institute required to copy.

“I would hope that it be accessible to anyone who puts in a request to listen to the material for scholarly or research purposes. In other words there should be some kind of initial screen against anyone trying to make use of the material for political purposes. The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, and the Chechnya conflict, are indeed very politicized. If used well, I hope this material would correct much of the simplified and propagandistic narratives that have grown up around these conflicts.”

“...In most cases, my interlocutors were actually very glad to put their versions of history—their spin of them—on the record. I asked them to request me to turn off the tape-recorder if they wanted to say anything confidential or off-the-record.

Thomas de Waal, email of May 4, 2015:
Challenges: Content

- Interviews followed by other content on the same tape
- Some files were duplicates, which wasn’t obvious from tape labels
- Special characters in file names
- Some items not labeled according to their audio content
  - i.e. tape labeled “Beethoven_Symphany_7_deinekin_side a.wav” contained an interview with Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev;
  - tape labeled “Holly” was actually an interview with Serzh Sargsyan
Challenges: Metadata

- More than one person speaking; no information on some speakers
- Variant spelling of names
- Some non-descriptive labels, such as “Thomas de Waal, Azerbaijan 2.m4a “ with no dates or names
### Description: Metadata Creation

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Field</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Vocabulary or Context</th>
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<th>Vocabulary or Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
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**De Waal Data Dictionary**

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<thead>
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<th>Field</th>
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**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Access: Audio and Transcript
Томас де Ваал (ТдВ) [00:00:06.00] - запись

Асланбек Хасбулатов (АХ) [00:00:06.20] - Я, Хасбулатов Асланбек Имранович. Уроженец города Грозного.

ТдВ [00:00:13.17] - А вы на сколько лет старше вашего известного брата?

АХ [00:00:17.18] - Я на 5 лет старше Руслана Имрановича.

ТдВ [00:00:22.03] - А вы 13 его посетили в Лефортово? Как его настроение сейчас?

АХ [00:00:30.10] - Ну я его посетил 13 января, мне вообще понравился он. Чувствует себя бодро,
[00:00:37.22] за собой никакой вины не признает, он убежден в том что он защищал конституцию.
[00:00:46.00] Никаких призывов к насилиственным мерам с его стороны он отрицает
[00:00:53.27] и то что произошло он не считает своей виной.
[00:01:00.04] А вот в "Правде" за 10-11 января опубликованы "Записи из Белого Дома," которые он писал начиная с конца сентября. В конце сентября он их начал и закончил где-то 3 числа. Ну я имею и копии подлинника, я был в редакции "Правды" сам читал копии подлинника
[00:01:29.23] этих записей. И вот у него постоянно эта мысль что он в общем-то
[00:01:38.21] совершенно отрицал, не признавал и не допускал мысли о
насилистных каких-то мерах, не только с их стороны но и против них.
[00:01:48.23] Он был убежден что все это кончится каким-то

Columbia University in the City of New York
Access: Reading Room Laptop
Access: Search and Facets
De Waal, Thomas. Thomas de Waal Interviews, 1984-2001

Thomas de Waal Interviews, 1984-2001

Catalog: 54

Articles: 62,328

Academic Commons: 60

Libraries Website: 0

GeoData: 0

E-Books: 0

Dissertations: 0

Chechnya: a small victorious war

Chechnya: captivity in the Caucasus

Black garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through peace and war

The Caucasus: an introduction
Discovery: ArchiveGrid

32  thomas de waal

ARCHIVEGRID

32  thomas de waal

ARCHIVEGRID


De Waal, Thomas
Columbia University

The digitized content of more than 70 hours of audio cassette tape interviews conducted by thomas de waal with some sixty participants and policymakers during the struggle between former soviet republics Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, and conflict of Russia with the breakaway republic of Chechnya. The digitized interviews include Orbish Duschan; the first president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, in the North Caucasus, who was assassinated by Russian special forces in April 1996, Vitali Durasin, Eduard Shevardnadze, then-President of Georgia, as well as numerous military figures, human rights advocates, and others directly involved in the conflicts. The interviews are primarily in Russian, but a small number is in English or includes segments in English. 57 Russian-language interviews were fully or partially transcribed in 2017.

Huishoudboekjes van G. de Waal-Schotsman (Amsterdam), 1912-1969

Waal-Schotsman, G. de
International Institute of Social History (IISH)

Systematische invulling. J. Penrion en families Huishoudboekjes van G. de Waal-Schotsman. Per week worden de baten opgenomen totdat gegevens kunnen worden geconsulteerd. Daarbij wordt een persoonlĳ kkelijke betrekking van 5-2 jaar per week door een jaarlijks voorgesproken. NaARICHIVEGRID

University of Missouri, Assembly Lectures Committee, Records, 1953-1962

ARCHIVEGRID

Vahan Emin collection, 1920-1991

Emin, Vahan
Stanford University - Hoover Institution Library and Archives

Serial issues, clippings, reports, appeals, resolutions, and letters, relating to Armenians and Armenian nationalism in the Soviet Union, and especially in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

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ARCHIVEGRID

Columbia University
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Discovery: the World

Thomas de Waal - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
https://carnegieendowment.org/experts
Thomas de Waal is a senior fellow with Carnegie Europe, specializing in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region.

Thomas de Waal - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_de_Waal
Thomas de Waal (born 1949) is a British journalist and writer on the Caucasus. He is best known for his 2003 book Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War.

Life and career - Reviews - Criticism - Bibliography

Thomas de Waal (@Tom_deWaal) - Twitter
https://twitter.com/Tom_deWaal
The rule of law in Georgia is really imperilled when Anna Dolidze, the country’s best lawyer and prime advocate of judicial reform, is threatened by the High Council of Justice with losing her job civil.ge/archives/3544.
1 day ago - Twitter

Thomas de Waal - Foreign Policy Research Institute
https://www.fpri.org/contributors
Thomas de Waal is a senior associate in the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Carnegie Endowment, specializing primarily in the South Caucasus region.

The Caucasus: An Introduction: Thomas de Waal...
In this fascinating book, noted journalist Thomas de Waal—a specialist on the highly-worried Black Garden—makes the case that while the Caucasus is often treated...
Promotion and Use

- Opening event in Harriman Institute:
  https://harriman.columbia.edu/event/celebrating-launch-tom-de-waal-collection-columbia-libraries

- Harriman Institute Podcast:

- Harriman Magazine Article:

- RBML public blog:
  https://blogs.cul.columbia.edu/rbml/2018/01/05/2752/
Thank you!

Questions? Contact:
Jane Gorjevsky
jg2138@columbia.edu