

Introduction to special issue 37.2 Netherlandic migrations: Identities

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This second special issue on Netherlandic migrations focuses both obliquely and specifically on identity making in conversation with social constructs and the etic imposition of, as well as external acceptance of or resistance to, those identities. The issue has been organized to specifically reflect these tensions; the academic articles that converge on features of identity making are interspersed with memory vignettes that invite the reader to reflect on the processes taking place: analyses of what we choose to remember, how memories inform and complicate the “I”, are compounded in Jenny Radsma’s final vignette, *What do we gain when we lose control*, a poignant consideration of the personal histories that form us and their unspoken impact on our actions as conscious memory slips away.

In keeping with the life story/oral history methodology underpinning both issues, the articles written by vasser-elong, Sennema, Keijzer and Beaulieu all rely on personal life stories, oral history data collection, or both, that are analyzed in terms of identities. vasser-elong, for example, describes the journey provoked by a Dutch last name, his subsequent search through DNA analysis for his ancestry, his research into the Vasser name that provoked an awareness of his extended and shared Dutch-African-American ancestry, and his choice to honour the maternal “roots” written on his body. Sennema discusses his late awareness of the Dutch identity that framed him as the son of immigrants, how that identity was preserved, enhanced and often, unassimilated to mainstream Canadian society, and the diary that led him to examine his identity more closely. Both are focussed on “roots”, albeit in significantly different ways, and the impact of their ethnicity across time and space on the ways in which they negotiate the Self.

Keijzer and Beaulieu are both concerned with conflicted identities, as well as identities externally imposed and internally accepted or resisted. Keijzer’s analysis of emerging adult narratives who feel “very very Dutch around anything that is slightly Dutch but for the rest of the time [...] mostly Canadian” is rooted in data that highlights the tension between enculturation into Canadian society and

upbringings that preserved the traditions of the “old country”. Those young adults, born in Canada, are prescribed Canadians, but they are an uneasy “fit” within the greater Canadian society, self-negotiating their identities through multiple narrative strategies that facilitate self-explorations of their multi-faceted identities and questions of belonging. Beaulieu’s article, on the other hand, analyzes several common narrative themes that characterized the life stories told by *Indische* people to Netherlanders to explain who the *Indische* were and what they had experienced. These narratives resist the ways in which they were externally perceived and written; the narrators found themselves in the Netherlands, where their self-perceived identities were clearly at odds with societal understanding. Their story is ultimately one of emic rejection of an etic identity and choice; the decision to immigrate to countries in which their ethnic designation had no relevance. Not coincidentally, that ethnic label is disappearing altogether in Canada and the U.S.A. and has become a theme in immigrant histories/journeys; who our ancestors were and where they came from, clearly interlocking with aspects of the articles by vasser-elong, Sennema and Keijzer.

The vignettes by Hols and Radsma invite us to ponder how identities of immigrant children were formed and re-shaped through their parents’ immigrant experiences. Hols’ memories of the unique characteristics of her landscape and personal circumstances that typify her immigrant family vividly bring to life the memories that shaped her and structure her being-in-the-world. Embedded in her stories, moreover, are unique data assemblages regarding the decisions and experiences of immigrants that can be mined for further analysis. Radsma reminds us, in *The underdiver*, of the critical importance of historical understanding. Living in Canada, a country that did not experience Nazi occupation, the immigrant descendants of those who did live under German occupation had little-to-no comprehension of the narratives that informed the daily awareness of the Dutch regarding their WWII experiences and the impact it had on the psyche and health of survivors and the country after the war. What remains “unspoken” informs misapprehension, and Radsma’s father, like the male survivors of WWII in Indonesia noted in Beaulieu’s article, did not speak of his experiences, thereby staving off the recognition of the suffering and fear that formed his identity, and silencing, like so many men of his generation, histories that must be recalled so that we “never forget” the shared trauma of multiple historical events.

The articles and vignettes in this edition highlight, once again, the power of life stories and oral histories as the source of historical and social data. The editors express the hope that they will provoke further research and analysis into all facets of the human experience narrated by those who lived and experienced them.