



# Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) KONINKLIJKE NEDERLANDSE AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN

## Ruptured Life Courses

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### **published in**

DH2015 Global Digital Humanities Conference Abstracts  
2015

### **document version**

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in KNAW Research Portal](#)

### **citation for published version (APA)**

van Faassen, M., & Hoekstra, F. G. (2015). Ruptured Life Courses: Institutional and Cultural Influences in Transnational Contexts. In *DH2015 Global Digital Humanities Conference Abstracts* <http://dh2015.org/abstracts/>

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## **SHORT PAPER THEME**

### **“Migrating People, Migrating Data”**

This short paper is part of two interlinked short papers which discuss the archival, custodial and digital challenges that impact the discovery, collection, preservation and content management of material and immaterial traces from the past that the Netherlands shares with Australia. (The other short paper is “Developing a Sustainable Model in Mutual Cultural Digital Heritage” by Nonja Peters.) In partnership with key institutional and community stakeholders, our pilot study on mobility between these two countries is about developing new understandings of the experience and representation of migration and how this has shaped an evolving sense of Dutch-Australian heritage and, with it, the consequences for the formation of cultural identities.

The deliberate play in the short papers linking theme “Migrating People, Migrating Data” is to signal the thematic content of the parent project, *Migrant, Mobilities and Connection* – that is, the socio-cultural material traces that append to the historical activity of people moving from one region to settle in another, in which the movement of bodies through space combines with information about their mobility through time. At the same time, it is to also signal the technical and conceptual challenges surrounding the consolidation of different data sources (both hard copy and digital) from a prior generation of technology to successive generations. For example, many Dutch community groups in both countries are actively collecting documents, artefacts, photographs and maps to pass on to future generations. However, few have developed sustainable workflows to ensure the sustainability of their “collections” and rarely are they familiar with cataloguing and metadata conventions which help describe an item’s provenance, role and position in the world. Planning for digital preservation therefore is uneven, leading to concerns about a “digital gap” in a community’s history. Mitigating the deleterious effects then of information loss and fading human recollection is an issue central to both the continued accessibility of cultural heritage materials and the digital preservation of historical knowledge beyond technology format lifetimes.

## **PROJECT MEMBERS**

Dr Nonja Peters, Curtin University & University of Western Sydney

Professor Paul Arthur, University of Western Sydney

Dr Marijke van Faassen, Huygens ING

Dr Rik Hoekstra, Huygens ING

Dr Jason Ensor, University of Western Sydney

## **SHORT PAPER 2**

### **Ruptured Life Courses: Institutional and Cultural Influences in Transnational Contexts**

**Marijke van Faassen & Rik Hoekstra**

**Huygens ING**

The focus for this project is the life courses of migrants. It is acknowledged that the life courses of all migrants have a rupture at the point of migration. As a result, the lives of migrants differ structurally from the lives of most other people, as their life courses are divided in a period before and a period after migration. Our central research question is about the questions of continuities and discontinuities in life, habits and life styles. As people migrated from the Netherlands to Australia in the post-World War II period, we ask what were the influences of both sending and receiving states, the emigrants institutions of both countries, their own communities and the churches on their enrollment for migration? It is a largely unexplored question whether and up to what extent these influences were continued or taken over by new agents after their migration and contributed to the way their lives shaped in their new country (Green, 2005, 263-265; Green and Weil, 2007, ix; Schrover and Van Faassen, 2010, 4; see also Elich, 1987).

The backbone for the research program is the development of a database that seeks to capture and aggregate data on the life courses of the migrants. The Dutch National Archives hold an archive with some 50,000 emigrant cards, corresponding to ca. 180,000 persons (as the cards register an emigrant unit, usually consisting of a family) or about ninety percent of all emigrants to Australia from 1945 to the mid-1980s (<http://www.gahetna.nl>). The Australian National Archives also have a collection of files about the same people, who for Australia were immigrants. These cards and files contain the core facts of the migrants life courses. Both collections are made accessible by databases. Explorative research has made it clear that it is possible to link the Dutch and the Australian records (<http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/emigratie>). The database in development combines records from the Netherlands and Australia and in this way demonstrates a resource with data relating to the life courses of virtually all Dutch-Australian emigrants from 1945 to 1980. This makes it possible to link and understand aspects of migration that could previously only be studied separately. The actual parent-project Migrant, Mobilities and Connection started in 2014 and is still in an exploratory phase. Results are preliminary.

Life courses are not a new field of study, having long drawn the attention of historians and social scientists alike (Maas et al., 2008, 7-8). However, studying lives has tended to either focus on the micro level or on the macro level. The micro historical approach is mostly qualitative as it works out case studies for individuals; the macro historical method is serial in nature and distinguishes patterns in the lives of groups of people.

An important example is the Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN) that contains a representative sample of all persons born in The Netherlands between 1812 and 1922, corresponding with ca. 77,000 people (<http://www.iisg.nl/hsn>). However, the HSN only contains information about the facets of life of the people that are contained in its database. The *Migrant, Mobilities and Connection* database of life courses (the 'backbone' of both projects) is suitable for similar research as the HSN, but that is only the starting point. As it has links to the actual Dutch and Australian files, it is possible to study groups of migrants in much more depth than only the records in a database would allow. The organization of the research around a new, comprehensive dataset (that will be enriched by digitized policy and case files in anonymized form) and using the computer assisted heuristics of the digital humanities makes it possible to connect the micro and the macro approaches into what we would call *serial qualitative research*. This method makes it possible to find patterns while keeping access to the details, to make representative selections for case studies and to generalize and quickly test representative coverage of the findings from in-depth case studies.

For all conceivable groups and selections it is possible to investigate the life courses of each member in detail. In this way it becomes possible to identify social networks of and around the migrants and follow their evolution as they migrated from a Dutch setting to the environment of their new homes in Australia. As the social networks evolved, it is possible to identify the different influences on their development. In this way we can combine pattern recognition of diverging lives and Dutch community formation and forms of assimilation in Australia with the pressures from the social context (Tilly, 2011; Brettell and Hollifield, 2014, 14-19; White and Houseman, 2002). We can research which institutions were involved and what were their influences on the lives of the emigrants both during their time in the Netherlands and after their emigration to Australia. The institutions include the Dutch and Australian governments, both consular services, but also the church and the employers- and trade unions (Van Faassen, 2014, 79-121; 162-168). Another question is how did the cultural background of the people such as the places of provenance and their religion contributed to the lives they led in their new country? This is complemented by the medical history and group differences that is made possible by medical records archives kept at the Australian National Archives (privacy regulations permitting).

The emigrant files also contain links to heritage institutions containing cultural heritage. The additional materials enrich the life courses and extend the fields of analysis. For example, the same people that are in life courses are also on the member lists of Dutch immigrant associations. Previously it was only possible to study the cultural lives in the Dutch Australian immigrant societies as a whole, but the life courses backbone links them to the people involved and their contributions.

It is our objective to complement the research project by a cultural heritage project that uses the same life courses backbone as its structuring device for building a site for the Dutch-Australian community. Its members will be invited to identify their families in the life course and to enrich its contents by contributing all sorts of personal materials like photos, pictures, diaries, letters and memorabilia. It is the intention that the site contributes to the community formation as its members may exchange experiences and come into contact with one another and with their Dutch past (Australian-Dutch Heritage Day, 06-14-2012). The community site is an objective per se, but can also contribute to the research project, as the materials of the community members may be used for further research into the Dutch-Australian experience and the memories of and the (changing) image of their former homeland.

Last but not least: reconstructing such a backbone dataset of life courses of migrating people and embedding it in both their communities could serve as a template for other countries as well. In order to be able to test this template statement, our research project has a comparative perspective, building on the work already done on German migrants by the Australian digital historian, Dr. Kristy Kokegei (Kokegei, 2012).

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

### **Marijke van Faassen**

Dr. Marijke van Faassen is a historian and works as a researcher at the Huygens ING (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences) in The Hague. She studied at VU University Amsterdam and was awarded her PhD in 2014 at the University of Groningen for a thesis on Dutch postwar emigration governance. At the Huygens ING she supervised several editorial projects. The focus of her research is on political and institutional history, migration history and international relations. Other publications include *Invisibility and selectivity: Special issue on Dutch overseas migration in the nineteenth and twentieth century (Magazine for Social and Economic History / Tijdschrift voor Sociale and Economische geschiedenis* 7:2, 2010, with Marlou Schrover)

### **Rik Hoekstra**

Dr. Rik Hoekstra studied History at Leiden University, specializing in the history and consequences of European expansion. He was awarded his PhD in 1993 for a thesis on the colonial history of Mexico in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. After obtaining his PhD, he has focused on the publication of historical information on the internet and has been working at the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands since 2000. Both a scholar and technician, he is responsible for IT support and management of many of the institute's numerous digital projects.