

Call for Papers ~ ‘Negotiating Displacement: New Perspectives in War, Migration and Refugee Studies’

**International Conference organized by NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies in collaboration with IMIS University of Osnabrück
Amsterdam, December 8-9 2019**

Since its foundation in May 1945 the NIOD in Amsterdam has studied war and genocide in their societal context, originally focusing on the experience and legacy of the Second World War. The present NIOD research program *War and Society* specifically studies the beginnings, developments and (long term) effects of wars and mass violence on societies and the individual. It aims to further academic insights and to inspire societal reflection on the challenges we face in our time.

Some of the most pressing current challenges are the various crises of mass displacement caused by extremely violent conflicts in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, the consequences of which are affecting societies locally and globally. In the public debate, these phenomena often are perceived as immediate threats (like fear of terrorism) or instant humanitarian emergencies. We feel the urge to take up Peter Gatrell’s question ‘how to write displacement into the history of genocide’ and complement it with the history of war: how can we write displacement into the history of war and genocide in order to reach better understand our current world ?

This conference thus aims at connecting research on war, mass violence and genocide with migration research hoping to deepen the dialogue between two disciplines that often look at similar phenomena but from different perspectives. Talking across disciplines may help unlock empirical, epistemological and methodological synergies and advance research on forced migration and its aftermath. Linking up with the Institute for Migration Studies (IMIS) of the University of Osnabrück NIOD hopes to create a strong point of departure to invite scholars to explore integrated perspectives on war and displacement.

Points of departure

We propose to rethink displacement caused by war and conflict from the perspective of the people who usually tend to be captured in the sterile, monolithic, and timeless categories of displaced persons, refugees, exiles, evacuees, migrants, and boat people. As Hannah Arendt once wrote from her personal experience: “we don’t like to be called “refugees”. We ourselves call each other “newcomers” or “immigrants”.” (Arendt, *We Refugees* 1943) Such

critique from below entails more than just the problem of labelling; it refers to questions of belonging, citizenship and cultural identities. Displacement as an object of research has several elements in need of further exploration: displacement as actual trajectories of people; displacement as a more or less formal status 'constructed' by the various actors involved; displacement as an experience and a perception by those on the move; and, finally, displacement as stories and histories. Thus, we are inspired to start thinking about 'how people negotiate their ways through displacement' as a way to conceive displacement in its historical connection to war and genocide. This is both the thematic point of departure for the intended academic meeting as well as for a public event the day before.

The public event: December 8

Our intention is to bring together people with diverging experiences, ideas, and knowledge with regard to migration induced by war and mass violence. We would like to highlight and explore how these multi-level issues generally are addressed in highly politicized environments. What does it mean if individual and group- experiences, as well as expertise are suddenly politicized or politically contested? This holds differently for different groups: in the first place for those who have gone through experiences of escaping mass violence and persecution and subsequently became defined by the word 'illegal'. Other examples are activists caught in polarized points of view or scholars of war and migration who engage in current political debates. These themes will be addressed in unexpected and interactive ways making use of theatre and other approaches from ('refugee') cultural life. For the purpose of connecting non-academic representations to scholarly approaches, we aspire to connect both days as platforms for dialogue, for the meeting of different perspectives, and creating mutual inspiration.

The academic meeting: December 9

The conference's guiding question is how displacement has been negotiated in the context of trajectories and status by individuals and groups from the First World War to the present in a global perspective. Since the academic event will follow the public event we take the freshly uncovered awareness within the group of academic participants of their own perspectives and specific kinds of expertise to think anew about 'how to write displacement into the history of genocide' and war.

We encourage historicizing and multidisciplinary perspectives that create ample opportunity to investigate the displaced persons' agency, room for maneuver and possibilities for creating their own social and cultural spaces within the limited and often harsh social, economic, and political parameters. We wish to explore the dynamics surrounding these

processes. For example, how displaced persons “negotiate” with others involved in relief efforts, rescue or trafficking, and with the people they encounter when settling in new environments. These “others” form, again in the words of Peter Gatrell, the “contours of assistance”: private entrepreneurs, governments, non-governmental organizations, and host communities. In addition, we also want to take into account how displaced persons address opposition, violence, exploitation, and rejection in their encounters with “others” as well as with fellow displaced persons.

Consequently, we invite contributions that relate to three main themes connected to negotiating displacement: Citizenship, cultural identities, and methodological approaches.

- *Citizenship.* This theme addresses the ways displaced people face the issue of citizenship, as both a legal as well as a social phenomenon, at the same time the original citizenship and the newly aspired citizenship. Relevant sub-issues are: statelessness, the position of minority groups and internally displaced persons (including issues like official amnesia and discouragement of acknowledging domestic refugee crisis), and coping strategies.
- *Cultural identities.* As identities are elusive and fluid and constantly reconstructed and contested, this theme looks into how displacement shapes processes of identity (trans-)formation in formal and informal social networks. We are particularly interested in the role and position of family, gender, class, ethnicity and ‘race’, political ideologies, and religion.
- *Methodology.* Displacement and how people and groups negotiate their way through it invites us to rethink questions of methodology, cross-disciplinary approaches, and knowledge production in general. How can we use the many new technological possibilities like text mining of large textual datasets to, for example, engage with life biographies and oral history or legal documentation? Or how could GIS (Geographic Information Systems) play a truly revolutionary role in our understanding of displacement? We especially invite contributions that link quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The format will be a succession of three panels, introduced by three key-note speeches (20 minutes each). The panels will have three contributors, speaking 20 minutes each, and one discussant. Before the lunchbreak MA and PhD students will give brief pitched of their related research projects; during the break the posters can be visited.

The organizers hope to receive paper-proposals (max. 300 words) connected to the three main themes mentioned above, **before April 14 2019**. Proposals should come with a brief CV of the sender. Those selected will be notified before May 14 2019. Depending on the amount of financial support the organizers will be able to muster, expenses for travel and stay for paper-givers may be partly reimbursed.

For more information, please contact the organizers via the Secretary of NIOD's Research Department Helen Koekenbier, email: h.koekenbier@niod.knaw.nl