

(Body)Mapping Statelessness: Bodies, Borders and Belongings.

An Abstract of the Thesis By
Oenema, Ina Thyra

Statelessness is often researched from a legal point of view; however, this thesis argues that statelessness is more than a legal 'black-hole'. This study demonstrates that statelessness consists of embodied lived experiences and researches the impact of statelessness on narratives of identity and belonging. This is done through participatory action research with eight participants in the Netherlands who are either recognized as stateless or have an 'unknown nationality status'. Drawing upon the guidelines of body mapping conceptualized by Jane Salomon (2002) and adopted by Gastaldo, Magalhães, Carrasco and Davy (2012), body mapping and semi-structured interviews were used to explore both spoken narratives and visual representations of lived experiences, under conditions of statelessness. Through this approach, stateless people drew life-sized maps of themselves and reflected on their past, present and future. Drawing upon Arendt's account of Vita Activa and the constellation of homes by Cathrine Brun and Anita Fabos (2015), this research then looks at how action and movement are both obstructed and enacted in the struggle for belonging. I argue that statelessness does not equate with 'rightlessness' (Arendt, 2004) but should be seen as an injury of both status and lived experience. Statelessness does not result in a complete absence of rights nor of agency, but adds layers of vulnerability which influences the way people see themselves and their (in) ability to root. Due to the invisibility of statelessness and the general lack of awareness of both public and politics, the current research aims to open up a space where stateless people make their bodies and narratives visible.