

Stories of Belonging:

A naked cat

"Neighbours cannot be trusted," Henny confided in me. "They act nice and then they take advantage of you". Henny knows what he is talking about, he ensures me, they've taken advantage of his mental handicap many times. They always make him do things he doesn't want to. "No, I don't like neighbours. I know them, I have seen them passing by my house. But I refuse to talk to them. Let them first show that I'm valuable".

"I just want someone to hold."

Henny is all by himself. "I'm like that little boy in the movie Home Alone, you know that one?" He left his parental home when he was 12 years old - "I didn't want to live with my parents anymore, and they didn't want to take care of me, so..." - Henny ended up in children's homes and foster families. He has never felt at home in his whole life. "I don't even know what that means," he told me. "When there is no one who loves you or cares for you, you cannot imagine what that must be like."

And that's exactly why Henny wants to have a naked cat. "Because they are always cold, they are very affectionate." He wraps his arms around his chest, as if he's hugging someone. "I just want someone to hold. I have never experienced that. In that sense, I'm as green as grass," he smiles timidly. "But the problem is," Henny continues, "if I'm away, who would take care of my cat? I can't ask a neighbour. Neighbours cannot be trusted. They act nice and then they take advantage of you." Henny knows what he is talking about.



Fenneke Wekker

Take-aways

Marcel Spierts: Panel Chair for The Role of Informality for Community Work
"During our session on how social professionals play a role in nurturing a sense of belonging for citizens in disadvantaged neighborhoods, a participant asked a question about the extent to which social professionals (can and do) share this sense of belonging and how this affects their professional practice. An interesting question that we did not explore before but now seems very relevant to our research on how informality and feelings of belonging contribute to community building and what that implies for social professionals."

Written@NIAS

Gloria Wekker (2016). [White innocence : paradoxes of colonialism and race](#).
Leslie Page Moch (2009). [Moving Europeans : migration in Western Europe since 1650](#).

Need assistance?

We are aware that the links did not work seamlessly as we had hoped and you can watch Prof Gloria Wekker's keynote on NIAS' Youtube channel. Contact our helpdesk via Whatsapp [+31 \(0\) 20 224 6704](#) for any troubleshooting or email us at events@nias.knaw.nl

Studies of Belonging Conference Newspaper

- Thursday 10 June 2021 -



Creating New Types of Knowledge

Many of today's panel sessions include both artistic and scholarly research. At NIAS we believe that arts and science need each other to be able to think beyond boundaries, to push each other outside of the disciplinary boxes, and to help understand social and cultural phenomena on the rational, the emotional, the bodily and intuitive level. This is the advantage of bringing various disciplines together;

It enables us to access multiple layers and create new types of knowledge that are necessary to understand and explain the world we live in.

"Push each other outside of the disciplinary boxes."

When a Country doesn't Love you Back

A lecture on the understanding of belonging by professor emeritus Gloria Wekker

In the first keynote speech of the conference, Prof. Gloria Wekker reflects on the emerging field of Studies of Belonging through the lens of race and intersectionality. By highlighting how the topic has been studied in various disciplines and by drawing on her own experiences as one of the very few Black female professors in the Netherlands, she makes the compelling argument that in order to get a meaningful understanding of this subject, we cannot remain colour blind. We have to be race cognisant and understand that although race in a biological sense does not exist, racism is very real, and it informs belonging for people across the globe.

Prof. Wekker shares how her book *White Innocence* was written out of a sense of justice for the Netherlands. As an act of love. But what happens when that love isn't reciprocated and when recent research shows that inequality of opportunities in the Netherlands begins the womb? Should we even love our homelands and expect them to love us back? Overly emotional relationships between nation-states and citizens might eventually produce exclusion because pluralism is no longer valued. Prof. Wekker points us to the fact that belonging

doesn't have to be exclusive - one can experience it in multiple places. She invites us to examine the notion that the opposite of love is hate and quotes Elie Wiesel who said the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference. We might start the process of overcoming that indifference and creating a welcoming reality for everyone by accepting our common humanity.

Ask Professor Wekker

Jeff Handmaker asks: **is radical equality primarily a state of mind, or something structural that needs to happen?**

A: I believe radical equality can be reached by a change in state of mind, but this is deeply intertwined with structural changes that are needed. For example, the way political leaders frame and address issues are so influential. It becomes ingrained in normative ideas about who belongs to the Netherlands and who doesn't. The Dutch childcare benefits scandal shows how racial discrimination is still at the core of how the government operates. And I'm afraid it will take a while before things will change at that end. In that sense, the Dutch party BJ1 gives hope. We should start somewhere..

Interview with Markus Balkenhol and Irene Stengs;

Coördinators of the thread 'Identity, Inequality and Politics'



"The papers show that it isn't enough to condemn inequality, but also to enquire how it functions or works."

What struck you when reading the papers?

That we had submissions from people who weren't the usual academic crowd. It was something new and positive and suggests that NIAS is putting real effort in diversifying. It is not self-evident to put scientists and artists together and think that it will work. Artists have a different approach and science has a different discourse, but it was also a positive challenge in making the panels.

How did you create the panels?

We did not want one arts presentation in each panel. That would be grouping two different types of presentation, and would not work. It would take on a performance-consumer role. The artists also need a sustained conversation so we created something more substantial where academics can choose to engage in.

What would you consider the essence of the thread to be?

There isn't a single essence as the papers are so diverse. But perhaps the idea of inequality. The papers show the complexity of identity politics and inequalities. Intuitively you'd say inequality is bad and everyone would agree with you, but would unwittingly go on to perpetuate it. So we need to understand how inequality works in localised contexts. The papers show that it isn't enough to condemn inequality, but also to enquire how it functions or works.

Highlights of Today

Performing Belonging

Thursday 10 June, 09.35 - 11.00h CEST

Art, Activism and Belonging

Thursday 10 June, 11.05 - 12.30h CEST

Keynote Lecture

In this keynote lecture, Amin Ghaziani addresses the importance of bounded residential area's and safe spaces as a condition for belonging for LGBTQ+ communities.



The Emplacement of Belonging

Thursday 10 June, 19.30 - 21.00h CEST

Check the [full Programme](#) & [Community Map](#) here.

Re-watch today's Keynote, Welcome- and Closing sessions