

NIAS  50  
years

# The Academic Year 2020/21

Netherlands Institute  
for Advanced Study  
in the Humanities and  
Social Sciences



*Jan Willem Duyvendak  
and Fenneke Wekker*

**T**he NIAS academic year 2020/21 will always remain a very special and, certainly, an unforgettable one. It was the year in which the Covid-19 pandemic hit the globe hard, and NIAS fellows from all continents tried to get to Amsterdam – with some being more lucky than others due to national measures and travel restrictions. Like every year, around 60 scholars, journalists, writers and artists had been carefully selected on the basis of their extraordinary work, to become part of the intellectual and interdisciplinary NIAS community. Being embedded in a group of academic and artistic researchers is for many fellows the main reason to apply for a residency in the first place. The informal encounters, the collective lunches, the social and cultural outings, as well as the internal diversity of the fellows cohort, allow for a unique experience for all.

The fellows group of 2020/21 was the first to become an online NIAS community, notably in the year in which NIAS started celebrating its 50th birthday. After “a couple of weeks of pure bliss,” as one fellow would call it in hindsight, when fellows could work and meet in the NIAS premises in September 2020, NIAS had to close its doors and fellows could only continue their fellowship remotely. While, on the

## *The informal encounters between fellows make up the beating heart of their fellowship*

one hand, some outsiders may assume that fellows predominantly come to the institute to work on their individual research projects, we, on the other hand, have always intuitively known that the informal encounters between them made up the beating heart of their fellowship. Now, after a long year of ‘zoom-meetings’ and online activities, we know for sure that NIAS without a physical community is only half the institute it can be.

This insight has made us aware of some key features of advanced study; aspects we used to take fairly for granted before the pandemic. First, especially in close connections to others, new imaginary and intellectual spaces emerge. Second, physical, proximate presence is an asset to in-depth and enduring collaborations between researchers from different disciplines, for them to find ways to

think out-of-the-box, to deviate from trodden paths and to discover new horizons.

Thanks to the huge effort and amount of energy that both fellows and staff members have put into keeping the community connected remotely, the digital NIAS environment still provided quite fertile ground for serendipity and new collaborations the institute aims for. However, this was far from self-evident, and not easy, given the unprecedented circumstances.

NIAS has been a special place for 50 cohorts of fellows since its establishment in 1971. Now, in 2021, we understand even better how indispensable the institute’s physical environment is for minds to wander free, for researchers to thrive, and for global intellectual networks to be forged. We want to share our gratitude for the fellows of 2020/21, who made the best out of the situation, and we hope to see them back in person soon. But before we say goodbye to them, this booklet will provide an overview of the highlights, the persons and activities that have made this fellows cohort and academic year so special. ☺

**Jan Willem Duyvendak**, Director, and **Fenneke Wekker**, Head of Academic Affairs

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# On Being an Intellectual Haven for All

On 2 September, we started the academic year both online and in person in the Eye Film Museum. With a talk on arts and science, beautiful pitches by Lisa Becking, Onookome Okome, Iris van Rooij, Maxime Rovere, Stephan Sanders and Myungji Yang, and an address by the director on what it means to be an intellectual haven.

“It is our ambition to be an intellectual haven for our fellows – but what exactly is an online haven? How do we ensure that our space

feels as a haven, an intellectual haven, where one is free to ask questions, to doubt and explore collectively; also for the fellows who can't physically be here (yet) but who are part of our NIAS-community. Let me say somewhat more about our ambition to be an intellectual haven for all. When we reflect on the notion of 'haven', the histories of Institutes for Advanced Study are interesting because they tell us a lot about the place of science in society, about the boundaries between society, politics and academia, or the lack thereof. The start and development of the first IAS at Princeton was directly related to the coming to power of German Nazism and the Nazification of German universities, pushing many scholars out of the country (and worse).



*Fellows arriving at the Eye Film Museum*

It is not a coincidence that totalitarian ideologies and regimes attack intellectual havens, ‘free spaces’ of thought and research. For example the Collegium Budapest was one of the first institutions forced to close by Orban. These are examples in which boundaries between spheres – in this case politics and science – are no longer respected; science becomes politicized and subordinated to political ideologies. The defense of the autonomy of science is necessary as is the defense of expertise as such.

But let me come to the even more difficult part of our ambition: being an intellectual haven for all. Some of you might have frowned while reading the title of this afternoon event: “Seriously, the most exclusive academic institution of the Netherlands has the ambition to be inclusive”? My answer to those sceptics is a clear yes, we do!

Particularly institutions that are difficult to get in, so exclusive, should make all efforts to select on the basis of inclusive criteria – not on the basis of established categories, powerful networks, dominant genders or hegemonic methodological approaches.



Myungji Yang

But why do we aim to be “an intellectual haven for all” when places at NIAS are actually quite limited? Well, what we mean by haven for all is equal chances of access, based on fair and relevant criteria, that are always up for discussion since we might be blind for our own biases as well. But this idea of an



Stephan Besser,  
Jack Vromen and  
Daniel Yacavone

“haven for all” is not just about individual fairness – it is also about the collective context in which good arts and science flourishes. We expect that individuals from various backgrounds will contribute to better collective scholarship: the whole will be more than the sum of its parts. To value and foster the variety of perspectives of a diverse group is not an easy thing to accomplish – but we are deeply convinced that the progress of our knowledge depends on the insights of the multiplicity of perspectives, approaches and methodologies. At NIAS, we believe that only through collective and inclusive ways of learning, science and arts can play their role in society. ☉

Watch the full event online: 

Full opening speech: 

# The Academic Year Community 2020/21



**Stephan Besser**

University of Amsterdam  
LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES

My pop-up lecture and the creative writing workshop gave me a whole new perspective on my writing and talking about my research. I wrote a poem for the first time ever and made progress in performing my research rather than just writing it up.

**Ingrid Van Biezen**

Leiden University  
POLITICAL SCIENCE



**Hein de Haas**

University of Amsterdam  
SOCIOLOGY

**Koen Leurs**

Utrecht University  
MEDIA STUDIES

My NIAS-Fellowship was a reflexive journey based on dialoguing and learning through F2F/zoom/WhatsApp mediated seminars, drinks, creative writing, reading clubs, pop-up videos, stand-up paddling Amsterdam and kayaking The Hague channels.



**Elin Bjarnegård**

Uppsala University  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

I achieved a better understanding of what makes me tick, workwise (as well as of what makes the clock stop).

**Marika Keblusek**

Leiden University  
ART HISTORY

In these strangest of times, lecturing from the strangest of places in a rainy and deserted Red Light District - I have been reminded to always think out of the box-of-self.



**Sabah Mofidi**

POLITICAL SCIENCE

**Onokome Okome**

University of Alberta  
AFRICAN LITERATURES

My goal was to finish my manuscript, "Nollywood: Text, Context, Controversy," for publication. NIAS provided a brilliant space for me to do this and it will be ready in a few months. But a far more important outcome for me was meeting and interacting with scholars and thinkers from across the globe.



## SEPTEMBER - MARCH 20/21



### Sandro Sessarego

University of Texas

LINGUISTICS

I was able to advance my historical research on colonial Mexico.



### Dan Yacavone

University of Edinburgh

MEDIA STUDIES

A sharper focus on the first chapter of my current book project thanks to my own NIAS seminar and acting as a seminar respondent (and the conversations before and after both)



### Jim House

University of Leeds

HISTORY

Helping me think much more about what my research project looks like when viewed from other disciplines and perspectives.

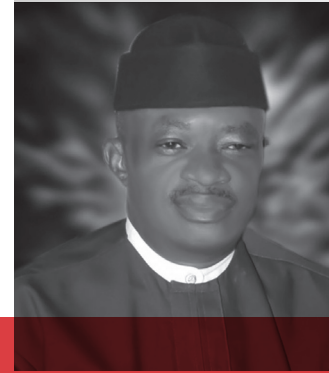


### Laura Downing

University of Gothenburg

AFRICAN LINGUISTICS

I learned to think bigger and broader, thanks to feedback I got on my project during my seminar and to inspiring conversations with my peer groups and walking companions.



### Christopher Agbedo

University of Nigeria Nsukka

LINGUISTICS



### Sander Beckers

Ludwig Maximilian University

COMPUTER SCIENCE, PHILOSOPHY

### Andrea Schatz

King's College London

JEWISH STUDIES

Finding the sources and courage to write the riskiest part of my book, while learning how to travel from the British Library to Amsterdam on the tube and arrive on time (3pm!).

### Lindsay Braun

University of Oregon

AFRICAN HISTORY

During my time with NIAS, I looked at my old subjects through new eyes, used new tools, and found new stories and meanings within them.

### Laura Bisailon

University of Toronto Scarborough

SOCIOLOGY

### Anar Ahmadov

Leiden University

POLITICAL SCIENCE

### Lisa Becking

Wageningen University & Research

BIOLOGY







**Juan M. Durán**

TU Delft  
PHILOSOPHY



**Alessia Pannese**

University of Oxford  
ART HISTORY, NEUROSCIENCE

A concrete outcome has been the publication of the paper: 'Epidemics, Regulations, and Aristotle's Physics of Motion: A Ballistic Perspective on a Current Debate'. A less concrete yet very real and durable outcome is all that I have learned from and ideated based upon my interaction with NIAS Staff and fellow Fellows.



**Maxime Rovère**

Ecole Normale Supérieure, Lyon  
PHILOSOPHY



**Martin Sand**

Delft University of Technology  
PHILOSOPHY OF TECHNOLOGY



**Stephan Sanders**

WRITER



**Jack Vromen**

Erasmus University Rotterdam  
PHILOSOPHY OF ECONOMICS

My NIAS-fellowship helped me with finding my own voice and tone.

**Giuseppe Primiero**

University of Milan  
LOGIC

A co-authored formal logic paper (presented at the Trust in Agents Society 2021 Workshop) strongly inspired by discussion with my fellow theme-group members, and a sketch of a more philosophical paper, currently in the making. More in general, a lot of new problems have opened up!

**Aleid Truijens**

WRITER

I did write the chapters of the Hella Haasse biography that I planned to write, covid or not...

**Nanke Verloo**

University of Amsterdam  
URBAN STUDIES

**Iris van Rooij**

Radboud University Nijmegen  
COGNITIVE SCIENCES

**Karin Jongsma**

University Medical Center Utrecht  
ETHICS



## FELLOWS SECOND SEMESTER 20/21



**Theresa Kuhn**

University of Amsterdam

**POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Grants, grants, grants: I applied for two large individual and one consortium grant. I don't know yet whether my applications have been successful, but just the fact of submitting grant proposals during this disrupted period of home office and home schooling felt like an achievement.

**Marguerite Van den Berg**

University of Amsterdam

**SOCIOLOGY**



**Roland Blonk**

TNO Science Academy Labour

**ECONOMICS**

An interview with 10,000 views on LinkedIn, a column on the Menselijke Maat, a podcast Bejegening, the route to my novel and essay, but most of all I found my writing style.

**Manuela Ciotti**

University of Vienna

**SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

'Standard progress' aside, the highlight of these months for me - and most pleasant discovery/achievement - was the creative writing course. It truly inspired me to communicate differently!



**Mario Damen**

University of Amsterdam

**MEDIEVAL HISTORY**

I've learnt to consider rivers not as borders but as (contested) territories which are shaped and produced by their self-proclaimed owners and users through naming, describing and picturing.

**Sophie De Schaepdrijver**

The Pennsylvania State University

**HISTORY**



**Jackie Dugard**

University of Witwatersrand

**LAW**

**Kobe de Keere**

University of Amsterdam

**SOCIOLOGY**

I have read three complete books, started working on a whole new theoretical framework and learned (once again) that there is a fluctuating correlation between time spent working and productivity.



**Anja Eleveld**

VU University Amsterdam

**LAW**

The walk in the Oosterpark with Saar inspired me to start to work on a new research proposal.

**Jeff Handmaker**

Erasmus University Rotterdam

**LEGAL SOCIOLOGY**

I re-discovered my musical and storytelling side ... and debated, discussed and drafted a longstanding project, namely: a socio-legal framework to conceptualize and analyze the potential of legal mobilization.



**Phil Kasinitz**

City University of New York

**SOCIOLOGY**

Exchange with scholars from different backgrounds, different disciplines, and different traditions. Getting to hear ideas, and to try out ideas, with smart people from areas has been a rare treat.

**Ville Kivimäki**

Tampere University

**HISTORY**

My main achievement has been to connect with a wonderful and inspiring group of scholars.





### Siniša Malešević

University College Dublin

**SOCIOLOGY**

I have completed the draft of my book manuscript and have greatly benefited from discussions with other fellows.



### Markha Valenta

Utrecht University

**SOCIAL SCIENCE**

My work at NIAS on the urban rights of informal migrants allowed me to develop the concepts and approach I needed to turn this into a form of community engagement, a book proposal and a NIAS-Lorentz workshop.



### Saar Slegers

**JOURNALIST**

I rediscovered how much I love to do in-depth research... and how I can struggle to then present findings in a coherent and fun way.



### Jennifer Makumbi

**WRITER**

I have written 50,000 words of my next novel, Alkebulan: The Return of the Leopard. I wrote like someone was coming to take time away from me. I was supposed to do less than that in a year.



### Frederiek de Vlaming

University of Amsterdam

**CRIMINOLOGY**

I found the focus of my article just by having more time than usual to reflect. This led to great conversations and new connections in the academic world and enriched my NGO work.



### Daphina Misiedjan

Erasmus University Rotterdam

**LAW**

### Sandra Khor Manickam

Erasmus University Rotterdam

**HISTORY**

Despite the mostly digital format I still managed to make a few friends, see a few people, and had some good ideas.

### Oscar Santillán

**ARTIST**

### Avi Sharma

Technische Universität Berlin

**HISTORY**

I re-engaged with international law and feminist scholarship and decided to teach a graduate seminar inspired by some of the presentations in the NIAS Seminar.

### Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh

Leiden University

**LAW AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

Creating a diverse and interdisciplinary community with like-minded souls in impossible circumstances!

### Imrat Verhoeven

University of Amsterdam

**PUBLIC POLICY**

My fellowship at NIAS helped me get to the heart of my book project and of my research agenda for the coming years.

### Katell Lavéant

Utrecht University

**CULTURAL HISTORY**

Since I couldn't write as planned, I gave myself more time to think a new project through. Faced with unexpected events, it is deeply reassuring to know what direction your research is taking.





## The Soul of a Community

Stephan Sanders reports on his fellowship in autumn 2020

**H**ow do you create a community from a standing start? And can it be done in ten months, or even five? That question is investigated empirically every year or six months at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, housed in the oldest, seventeenth-century part of Amsterdam, the same neighbourhood where, again on De Wallen, I lodged in my student days (1981–88). All these years later, on 31 August 2020, I start a five-month fellowship. My old neighbourhood, the things that have disappeared, but above all:

*Stephan Sanders  
at the start of his  
fellowship*

a new place. A neatly laid out office, with desk, computer and telephone, and a view of a courtyard garden. Next to me and across from me are neighbours sharing the corridor, people no more than ten paces away, mostly academics, all with doctorates, some of them professors at Dutch or foreign universities (Nigeria, Canada, Germany, Sweden). You come upon them in the corridor, at the toilets, some leave their doors open, and just like on a campsite, you issue a friendly greeting if someone looks up. No need to carry the toilet roll under your

## *Continually being brought up to date by people who have spent ten years engrossed in their field of study*

arm. The last time I went camping, incidentally, must have been in 1981. The proximity of so many people: you can speak to them, perhaps you really ought to speak to them, because the thin walls are no excuse. Then there's our shared fate. We have all briefly been excused to work on our projects: the sociologist, the marine biologist (!), the philosopher and the historian. Are there shared interests too? Yes, certainly, but the principle here is that interests rub up against each other. In prevailing university practice the disciplines are clearly delineated – social sciences here, humanities there – but in their content they have so many interfaces that those dividing lines come

to seem artificial. The NIAS aims to investigate the possibilities of an 'interdisciplinary conversation', to use the formal term.

The biweekly seminars, in which scholar X or Y talks about their research, are intended to facilitate knowledge transfer and debate. It's a pleasure to be attending lectures again, especially now that it's not for study credits. All that free information. Continually being brought up to date by people who have spent ten years engrossed in their field of study.

But when it comes to 'community building', you can surely expect most from informality: the lunches in the shared lunchroom; the chance meeting in the hall; and then there's the garden, which cries out for white wine and relaxed conversation.

The marine biologist and I share a great love of the Balearic Islands. The garden enables us to discover this. The Nigerian, who usually lives and works in Canada, immediately starts behaving like an old friend who happens to have been out of the picture for fifty years. Three cheers for chance meetings, three cheers for unplanned, un-Zoomed conversation!

### **Shut down**

That's how it was cautiously starting to look, that first month in September 2020. I say cautiously, because Covid-distancing prevailed from the start. A strange plastic flap had been attached to the toilet doorhandle; you stuck your sleeved arm through it and you were in. Plastic gloves and disinfectant wipes lay next to the coffee machine. We drank wine at a suitable distance, but in that warm afternoon sun. It all seemed like a prelude to many more beautiful experiences, but that one garden afternoon was the first of them and also the last. In mid-October NIAS shut down. We stayed in contact via Zoom,

via Teams or other ‘content information platforms’, but from that moment on, happy coincidence had barely any part to play. The international ‘fellows’ were stuck in their small bedrooms, the cafés and restaurants of the city closed their doors, and everything that ought to have developed informally now became a task, a computer assignment.

Everyone knows what talks and congresses are all about: the time afterwards, the contacts made in the corridors, the three participants

## *Informality cannot easily be relocated to a computer*

who unanimously decide to skive off for an hour or so. Communities are created from a standing start through informality, and that informality cannot easily be relocated to a computer, no matter how sharply focused the camera or how immaculate the microphone. It so happens that my own research explores the ‘informal boundaries’ of ethnicity and colour. In recent years, we in the Netherlands have spoken on the subject in terms of ‘black’ and ‘white’, plus that awkward residual category ‘people of colour’ for all those mixed types that cannot easily be allocated a place.

With the aid of various international authors (including Margo Jefferson, Thomas Chatterton Williams, Albert Murray, Ralph Ellison and Dutchman Raoul de Jong) I intend to show that the formal ‘black-white’ classification is unsatisfactory, both ethnographically and politically. Between black and white lies a whole spectrum of colours,

from dark brown to light beige, and as far as I’m concerned it would be unthinkable to place all those people, against their will, within the formal, anti-racist framework, which is binary: black or white. There is an ethnic continuum, in which the formal boundaries do not apply. Colours and ethnicities bump up against each other, as in a children’s game.

### **Unplanned carelessness**

At its best, NIAS is a luxury campsite, where people intermix, crossing the guy ropes. Friendly, interested, irritated perhaps. Which also means across the colour boundaries, because in practice those turn out not to mark any real boundaries at all but rather transition zones. The informal approach works best here by far.

The staff of NIAS did all they could, but Covid imposed strict limitations. What remained were the ‘formal appointments’: computer-driven, at a safe distance. There was no other option, but that great quote by doctor, philosopher and writer Bert Keizer remains valid: ‘The soul is in the body the way the mood is in the party...’ The soul of a community, a five-month camping community if it comes to that, relies on some unplanned carelessness. That too has been proven empirically during the 2020/21 term at NIAS. ☉

**Stephan Sanders** (1961) is a Dutch writer, columnist, essayist and radio- and television presenter. He worked on a book on the disappearance of different shades of ‘brown’ from political and public debate, supported by the Nederlands Letterenfonds.

Read the full story:



This year working and reading groups were set up, next to the standard routine of weekly seminars by individuals. Fellows joined forces around a particular topic, to engage in interdisciplinary collective learning.

## Reading group Communities, territories and borders

This year, NIAS created a very special opportunity for fellows to study the “border form” (Balibar) across time, space and disciplines. Where else would it be possible for experts on medieval Brabant, the early modern Republic of Letters, colonial Southern Africa and the global cities of the present moment (to name just a few research areas) to share and discuss their perspectives on communities, diasporas, territories and “bordering”?

The group studied Stuart Elden and Saskia Sassen; it returned to Benedict Anderson, taking unanimously issue with his surprising claim that “then and now the bulk of mankind is monoglot”, while exploring the ongoing productivity of his proposals; it discussed Luca Scholz’s work on mapping boundaries and channelling movement in the Holy Roman Empire and found that his analysis of proliferating control points in the interior rather than along exterior boundaries

also shed light on the current interplay between interior and exterior practices of “bordering”, where the border is effectively everywhere. Daniel Schwartz’s book about ghettos – from early modern Italy to post-war America – offered the chance to discuss the enormous ambivalences of internally imposed boundaries that threaten communities, while also – sometimes – supporting semi-autonomy and communal self-assertion. In the end and for the future, among the many new questions raised, one stood out in particular: how can we think beyond the border form?

## Working Group Intersectionality

The intersectionality reading club, short for the “Pains and gains of addressing the interrelatedness of identities and power hierarchies” was an initiative taken by NIAS fellows Elin Bjarnegård, Koen Leurs and Jan Willem Duyvendak. The group was set up with a shared desire to discuss concepts and theories that link identities and power relations in various ways, to better understand the contexts and histories of these approaches, and to look at the impact of these conceptions in public and political debate.

Over the course of 6 lively meetings, NIAS fellows with various degrees of affinity with intersection-

ality came together to exchange ideas on related sub-themes, usually together with invited colleagues from universities in the Netherlands and beyond. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic and time limitations faced by all, the group developed a strong routine of dialogue. Exchanges were conducted on the basis of prepared introductions to different themes, including histories of intersectionality, the reception of intersectionality across disciplines, geographical contexts, and societies, parallel approaches, and intersectionality in political practice.

Invited speakers include Katrine Smiet (Radboud University) who introduced the group to (pre) histories of intersectionality, Anna Keuchenius (University of Amsterdam) who spoke about the circulation of intersectionality, Sébastien Chauvin (University of Lausanne) on the academic and societal debate on intersectionality in France, Rivke Jaffe (University of Amsterdam) on assemblage theory, and finally Quincy Gario (Bij1) who reflected on the role of intersectionality in Dutch politics and arts.

In the future, NIAS fellows might want to continue thematic intellectual dialogues, which for us worked well through the digital platform zoom, on the basis of a committed core group of up to 10 fellows and several external colleagues, alongside steady food for thought provided by a diverse group of invited guest speakers. ☺

# Pop-up Lectures

From gender quota to 16th-century Facebook



While the lockdown in the Netherlands continued, Fellows came up with the idea of having a series of Pop-Up Lectures with the quiet streets of Amsterdam as playground. Six Fellows from the year group 2020/21 present their pop-up lecture, where they show the relevance of their topics, tease out the ambiguities of their research, and leave us with something new. All this in five minutes. “Now that I’ve seen the pop-up lecture, I understand the topic more clearly than after the 2-hour seminar,” one fellow fellow admitted... ◉



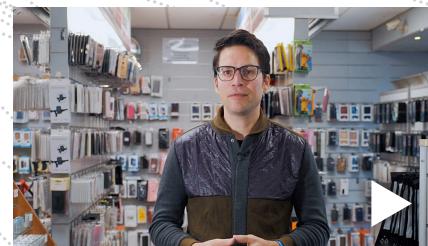
**Elin Bjarnegård**

Window of opportunity or window dressing?



**Maxime Rovere**

What is sex all about? A philosophical answer



**Koen Leurs**

Digital Intimacy



**Marika Koblusek**

Why Facebook was invented in de XVIth century



**Stephan Besser**

A world of patterns



**Laura Bisailon**

Screening Out



## NIAS Annual Lecture

On the 21 April 2021, NIAS held its Annual Lecture titled “An Imagined Past: The Politics of History Making” with Jennifer Tosch, Christopher Bertossi and Femke Halsema.

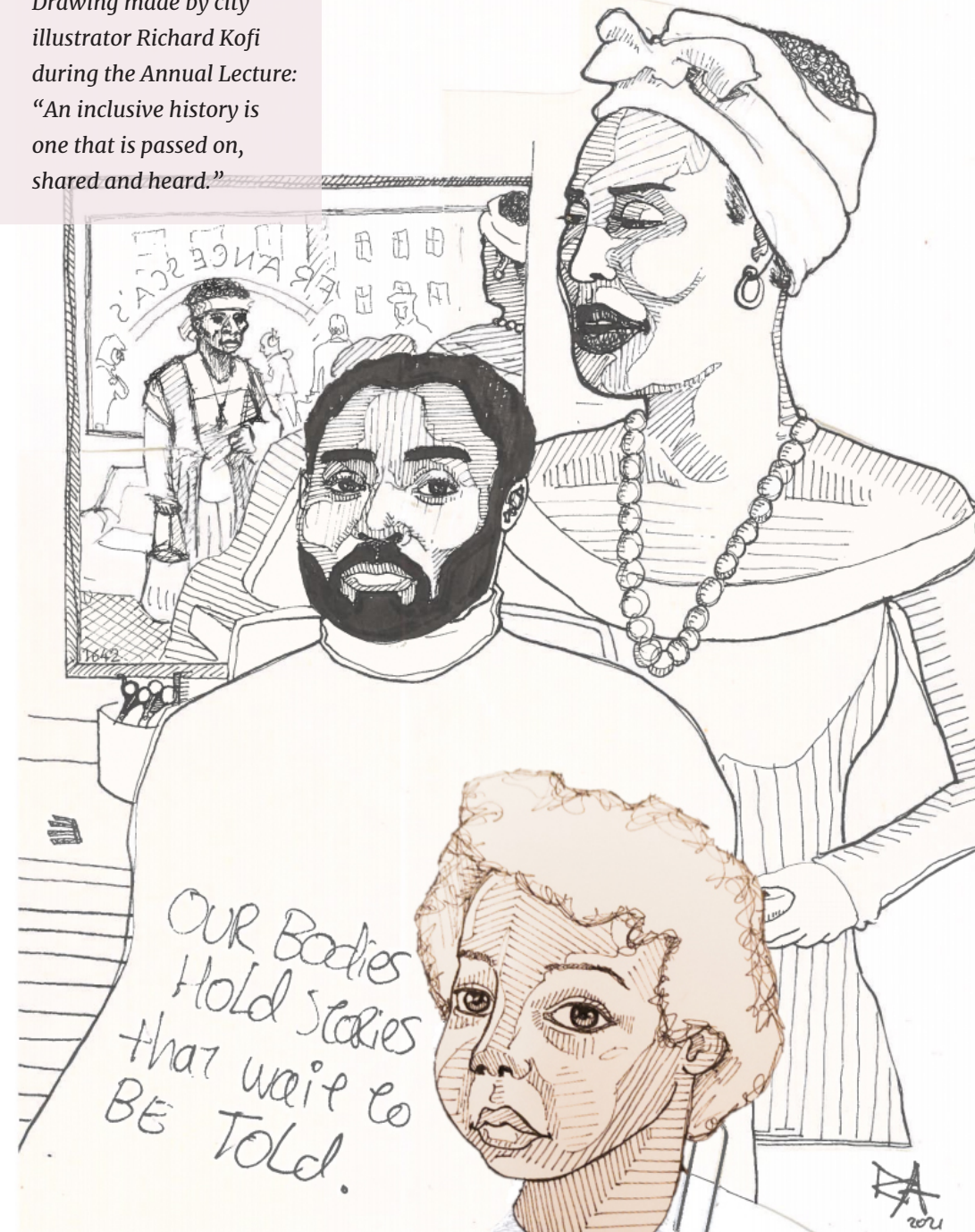
**H**istory has become the battlefield of our times. And one of the symbols has been the fight, pro and against, around statues of prominent figures. One end of the spectrum wants to be proud of the past and is deeply nostalgic, whereas mobilisations like Black Lives Matter show that there isn't much to be proud about and demand reparations. A lot of the political struggles of the moment are about interpretations of the past and that is why this year's Annual Lecture was about history and politics. The Annual NIAS Lecture 2021 was the last in a trilogy on history and politics, and the diversity of the speakers showed that it is more than a scholarly enterprise. NIAS wants to contribute to a meaningful and constructive discussion on history, to do justice to the past and present. The Annual NIAS Lecture offers new perspectives in ongoing public debates.

“We live in a polarized time, where the past has become the battlefield of the present. Apart from getting the historical facts right, we urgently need a shared understanding of that past as well. To bridge the schisms of the present.” – Prof. Jan Willem Duyvendak ☉

Watch the full programme:



Drawing made by city  
illustrator Richard Kofi  
during the Annual Lecture:  
“An inclusive history is  
one that is passed on,  
shared and heard.”





Klamer



KahliyaRonde



Tanu Patodia



Manuela Ciotti



ad van Richard



Marika Keblusek



Elly



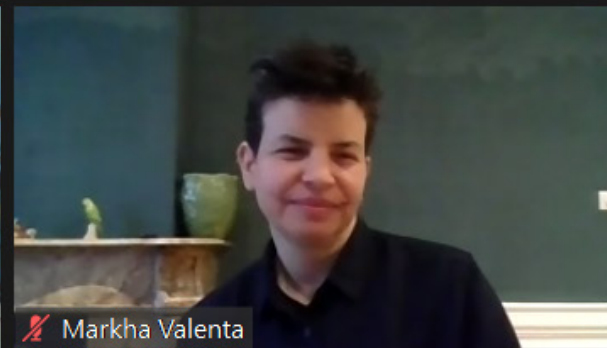
Zará Kars



leurs



Info NIAS



Markha Valenta



Laura Downing

*“Being at a NIAS meeting is like looking into a kaleidoscope: with every participant, coming from her of his own background, the image shifts and reconfigures in new and unexpected ways.”*  
 – Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh



Ingrid van Biezen



Elin Bjarnegård



*Grievances during a  
citizen participation  
evening*

## **Some thoughts on Citizen-State Relations and the Rights to the City**

Phil Kasinitz, Fellow 2020/21 reflects on the NIAS Talk: *Hear me Out!*, where Urban Citizen Fellows Anouk de Koning, Nanke Verloo and Markha Valenta discussed their research with Alderman Rutger Groot Wassink and Chief Science Officer, Caroline Nevejan, at the Municipality of Amsterdam.

**A**s a New Yorker, my first reaction to the excellent SPUI25 program featuring the NIAS Urban Citizen Fellows was one of jealousy. Over the past several decades many cities, including my own, have taken steps to make urban governance more inclusive; to let citizens have their say—or at least to let them feel as if they do! Community input is generally accepted as a good thing and many cities are now exploring different ways to make it happen. But in few places would a municipal government invite busy-body academics to study these processes, much less to report on how they might go wrong. I cannot imagine New York politicians, planners and bureaucrats sitting still and politely listening as academics discuss the pitfalls and limitations of their efforts to democratize urban governance, much less supporting and partially paying for the enterprise! My long-held admiration for Amsterdam—both its municipal government and its social and cultural traditions— has grown even deeper. And yet, for all of the perhaps uniquely Dutch (or perhaps uniquely Amsterdam) good will and spirit of cooperation on display, many of the problems discussed are strikingly familiar to the foreign visitor. Giving “the community” its “say” obviously raises the question of who speaks for “the community”—indeed who is the community? Do the

views of long-time residents take precedence over those of newcomers? I am not sure they should, but I am quite sure that many long time residents would disagree. When thinking about the future of a part of the city, how much should we privilege the voices of local residents – in effect the people who sleep there—over those of the people who work there, shop there or create and consume culture there? Do certain marginalized social groups – African Americans in the US, Jews in Europe, LGBT people almost everywhere – have a special relationship to those urban spaces in which they have

*In few places would a municipal government invite busy – body academics to study democratization of urban governance, much less to report on how they might go wrong*

historically found safety, autonomy and even a bit of freedom? Does this kind of cultural or, to borrow Sharon Zukin’s phrase, “moral ownership” extend to members of these groups who no longer live in these places? How do professionals and experts, even assuming all of the good will in the world, keep from imposing their definitions of the problems and limitations on the debate? And in today’s world, how do we create a “right to the city” for our fellow urban residents who live,

work, raise their families among us yet lack legal authorization to even be physically present within the boundaries of the nation state, much less exercise the rights of citizens?

Anouk de Koning's study of the dilemmas of "welfare state 2.0" throws many of these questions into sharp relief. With her keen anthropological eye, De Koning examines the results as well as the unintended consequences of efforts to create a more "intimate," less fragmented and less alienating welfare system. Yet, even with the best of intentions, it is hard for the largely middle-class professionals

*It is hard for the largely middle-class professionals running the system to avoid setting the agenda and defining the problems in terms they know how to address*

running the system to avoid setting the agenda and defining the problems in terms they know how to address and, as a result, limiting the scope of discussion.

This is particularly clear when issues are raised around race.

While generally committed to an ideology of "race blindness" these professionals risk imposing unconscious white middle-class standards.

At the same time, they are reluctant to take up a specific discussion of

race even when the clients understand issues in starkly racial terms. De Koning attributes this reluctance in part to the lack of training in how to talk about race, and this is undoubtedly correct. Yet I also suspect that many of these professional "problem solvers" are uncomfortable with issues and problems that are clearly beyond their capacity to solve. In Nanke Verloo's account of the politics of citizen participation one can almost feel the frustration in the encounters between local activists and city officials and planners. Of course, most of the time relatively few citizens actually participate. Who can blame them? One is reminded of Oscar Wilde's observation on the problem of socialism: it requires too many meetings. Thus, those who do participate are often self-appointed leaders whose voices are most likely to be heard simply because they care about a local issue more than most of their neighbours.

### **History of grievance**

These residents often enter this discussion already frustrated. For them, whatever local problem is at hand is just one more chapter in their relationship with the municipality. Today's issue cannot be understood without being put in the context of a long history of grievance. Add to this well-earned and largely justified distrust that many working-class people have of middle-class professionals and experts, and you have a recipe for cynicism. And this, in turn, frustrates the professionals and planners, who can easily grow impatient with rehashing old battles. Often, they seek instead to define today's problems in terms that are technical, limited and ultimately, solvable; narrowly defined problems with limited but achievable solutions that often turn out to be less appreciated than they would like.

While Verloo's study is critical, as an American I am once again filled

with admiration both for the citizens, who are willing to put the time and effort into participating, and of the municipal officials who seem to actually want to encourage citizen participation, even if they are not always sure how to go about it. Yet it is hard for civil servants and technical experts not to set the boundaries of debate, even if that is not their intention. The result, Verloo reminds us, can be a de-politicized form of politics that leaves the would-be citizen participants once again feeling ignored, unheard and powerless.

## *Different notions of societal membership emerge on the streets of diverse cities*

Markha Valenta's work, still in its early stages, puts front and centre an issue of vital importance in cities across the planet. How do we talk about "rights to the city," indeed of rights at all, for the unauthorized, the undocumented, the illegal non-citizens who don't actually have "rights" under most traditional liberal formulations? The idea of "human rights" is enshrined in the UN charter and other multi-national organizations. Yet it seems clear that this notion has not been particularly successful in protecting the rights, welfare or even the lives of many people in today's world. The right to migrate, to seek refuge and be granted shelter and safety, seems to be under attack everywhere. This issue has been highly contentious in the US, the self-styled "nation of immigrants". The movement of the "Dreamers" – young

adults who came to the US illegally as children and are now seeking opportunities to fully participate in the economy and society of the only country they have ever really known, is a clear example. The Dreamer movement has taken up the tactics and vocabulary of the African American Civil Rights movement, the social movement that has been a model for so many other groups. Their marches, their speeches, the unselfconscious way they quote Martin Luther King, all speak to their cultural integration. So much about them seems so American! Yet while part of US society economically, socially, and culturally, the Dreamers remain excluded legally and politically. Thus, their lives are precarious and vulnerable. The Civil Rights model has limited utility for people who do not actually have many civil rights. As Valenta suggests, we need new ways of thinking about rights, solidarity and citizenship on our increasingly interconnected planet.

### **Amsterdammers**

This brings us to a question of "urban rights" and the role cities can play in welcoming and protecting their denizens. Here European cities have generally been more proactive than American ones, for example, by granting voting rights in municipal elections and other forms of political participation to non-citizen residents. And on both sides of the Atlantic, urbanites, particularly urban youth, carve out identities more tied to the city than to the nation. The young adults of immigrant parentage I studied in New York often asserted that, while they did not feel strongly "American," they did see themselves as "New Yorkers" – much as their counterparts see themselves as Amsterdammers (or Berliners or Londoners). And many of the children of natives seem to share this identity, at least in part. Whether these identities are rooted in urban practices and communities (as Lefebvre would suggest) or in

the blasé tolerance emerging from the experience of everyday life in the metropolis (as Simmel would have it) or in the simple fact that cities tend to attract those with a taste for diversity and repel those without it, it does seem that different notions of societal membership emerge on the streets of diverse cities.

*Indeed, the unpredictable and serendipitous encounter, so much a defining feature of urban life, has been among the first casualties of the pandemic*

How can we give these notions a political form? In my country efforts by municipalities to grant rights to newcomers are now routinely undercut by state governments which have the power to limit municipal innovations. And even in the tolerant Netherlands, Amsterdam's autonomy is limited by a national government that includes parties who, as Deputy Mayor Groot Wassink articulately put it, "think we are cuckoo".

### **Covid-19 and the city**

Clearly, these presentations have left me with more questions than answers. Thus, in lieu of a real conclusion, I will raise one question

more. What does Covid-19, and, more specifically, the withdrawal from public space it has necessitated, mean for "rights to the city"? Today most of us are socially distancing among people – our relatives and nearest neighbours – who are often very much like ourselves. We have withdrawn from the very places where we used to engage with "the other" and encounter difference. Indeed, the unpredictable and serendipitous encounter, so much a defining feature of urban life, has been among the first casualties of the pandemic. How and when will we return to these spaces? And will we find we prefer to live without them? It is too early to say. Yet as these excellent presentations show, the next few years will offer new challenges to our efforts create a more humane, more just and ultimately more democratic city. ☺



The three day interdisciplinary working conference on Studies of Belonging mapped the field of Belonging as an academic and artistic field of study, with the aim to set up a research agenda and establish future collaborations on this topic.

On the occasion of NIAS' 50th Anniversary, everyone was welcome to the three keynote lectures given by eminent academics who explored the concept of Belonging from their own areas of expertise. ☺

Professor Gloria Wekker "When a country does not love you back"



Professor Amin Ghaziani "The Emplacement of Belonging"



Professor Nadim Rouhana "Homeland and the Right to Belong"



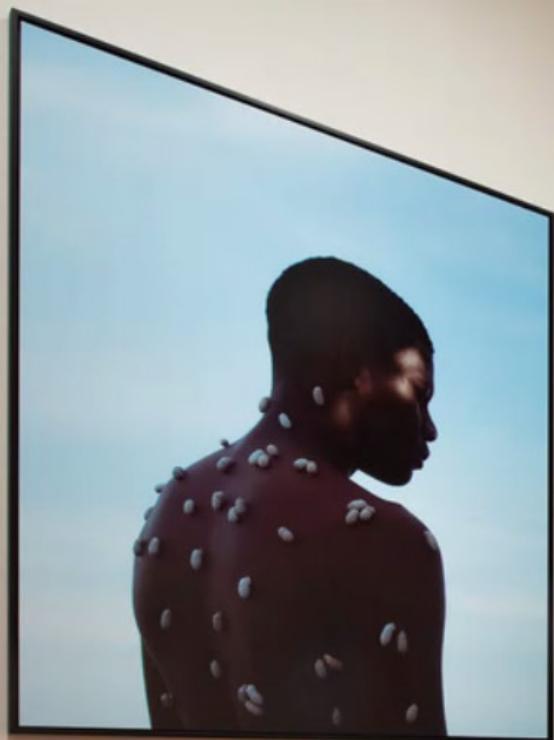
Opening of the Conference



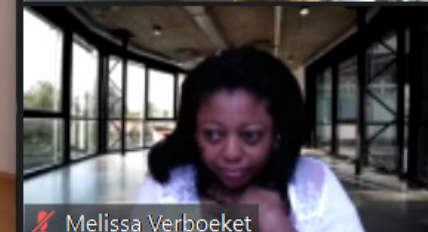
Programme and community map







On 19 May, fellows met online with curator Imara Limon and artistic director Margriet Schavemakers, to get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of how the Amsterdam Museum aims to create and present an inclusive history of the city.



## NIAS Talks

In the second year of NIAS' collaboration with Amsterdam's cultural center Spui25, we organised ten public lectures. During the NIAS Talks, fellows or alumni of the Institute engage with journalists, scholars or cultural practitioners to offer new or interdisciplinary perspectives to the current state of affairs. These talks are specially designed for a non-specialist audience and are all streamed online.



Jaap Tielbeke  
 Jeff Handmaker  
 Daphina Misiedjan  
 Fenneke Wekker (moderator)

15 October 2020

### Whose Climate Crisis is it?

Where do we take the struggle for climate justice when governments continue to fail to make structural changes which are urgently needed? During this NIAS Talk, journalist Jaap Tielbeke and legal scholars Jeff Handmaker and Daphina Misiedjan discuss the role of (environmental) law in increasing efforts to fight climate change.



Iris van Rooij  
 Louise Gunning  
 Sarah Durston  
 Kenneth J. Gergen  
 Jan Willem Duyvendak (moderator)

26 November 2020

### Distinguished Lorentz Fellow Talk: Beyond the Crisis in Psychology

During this year's Distinguished Lorentz Fellow talk current fellow Iris van Rooij addressed the crisis in psychology and discussed the need for interdisciplinary research to solidify theoretical foundations in the cognitive sciences.



Laura Bisaillon  
Emy Koopman  
Kristine Krause  
Zará Kars (moderator)

**10 December 2020**

## The Unmaking of Medical Inadmissibility

Fellow Laura Bisaillon premiered her documentary at this NIAS TALK which was on medical inadmissibility, and the process of Othering in the current immigration process in Canada.



Fenneke Wekker  
Jan Willem Duyvendak  
Irene Stengs  
Amade m'Charek  
Tanu Patodia (moderator)

**4 February 2021**

## Mapping Belonging as a Study

'To belong: to be in the right place or a suitable place. To feel happy or comfortable in a situation.' According to the Cambridge dictionary, the very word 'belonging' conjures up warm feelings. But what about the tensions present in this word?



Simon Willmetts  
Willemijn Aerdt  
Richard Aldrich  
Rutger van der Hoeven  
Fenneke Wekker (moderator)

**12 January 2021**

## Are secret agencies all that Secret?

In this NIAS talk, Fellow Simon Willmetts will focus on world's famous intelligence service, the CIA, and how they have tried to come to terms with this new public role.

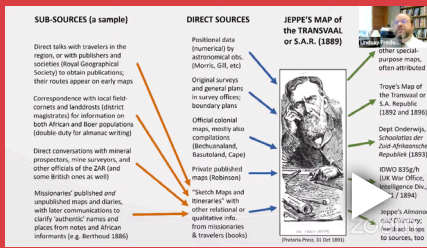


Maria Kaika  
Michael Keith  
Markha Valenta  
Charalampos Tsavdaroglou  
Fenneke Wekker (moderator)

**15 February 2021**

## Newcomers' Right to the City

With increasing worldwide migrant mobilities it is not always clear who has the right to the city. This NIAS Talks investigates what the role of the newcomer is in an urbanized world.



Lindsay F. Braun  
 Nancy Jouwe  
 Fenneke Wekker (moderator)

15 March 2021

## Rethinking Colonial Cartography – Collecting and Mapping Knowledge of South Africa

This NIAS Talk investigates late nineteenth century maps of southern Africa, made and compiled by European settlers. Many colonists who settled in what would become South Africa felt the need to map the land in order to 'know' it. But what do these colonial maps tell us when we read them as texts?

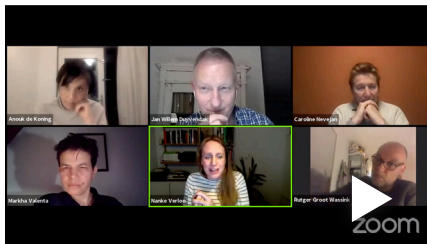


Manuela Ciotti  
 Premjish Achari  
 Bronwyn Lace  
 Zará Kars (moderator)

26 May 2021

## Experiencing Art in Pandemic Times: Unfolding 21st Century Scenarios

In this NIAS Talk Arts and Sciences come together in an interdisciplinary programme when we explore what are the consequences of the major transformation taking place in art institutions as a result of the ongoing public health crisis?



Anouk de Koning  
 Markha Valenta  
 Nanke Verloo  
 Caroline Nevejan  
 Rutger Groot Wassink  
 Jan Willem Duyvendak (moderator)

1 April 2021

## Hear me Out! Citizen-state relations in the city

How are processes of democratization played out in different scenarios of citizen engagement and participation? In this NIAS Talk we explored what contemporary urban citizenship means, in light of the increasing emphasis on democratization within the Dutch, and specifically Amsterdam's, political agenda.



## Academic Freedom

Academic freedom – the cherished freedom to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure, is under threat.

In myriad ways, and in a wide variety of countries.

There is the direct interference by politicians on saying what researchers can study but also

indirectly by what research grants are made available. There are external threats to academics, coming from politicians, media and public, but also internal threats, of academics attacking other academics. NIAS is deeply disturbed by the attacks on academic freedom and on scholars world-wide. Scholars must be able to pursue their curiosity, creativity and critical spirit, in order to build a comprehensive

knowledge base. To address the issue NIAS organised a first discussion seminar entitled “Academic Freedom: culture wars, ‘islamo-leftism’ and French Academia” with fellows and colleagues from the Royal Academy, starting a series of events on academic freedom. ☉

**Eric Fassin**, Professor of Sociology at the University of Paris 8 St-Denis. Fassin himself is confronted with the current government’s culture war against “woke” social science theories that it says threaten France. “It is important to think beyond borders. What in the past seemed to happen far away in authoritarian regimes is happening closer to home. There are differences but the logic is the same; it is an attack on critical knowledge.”

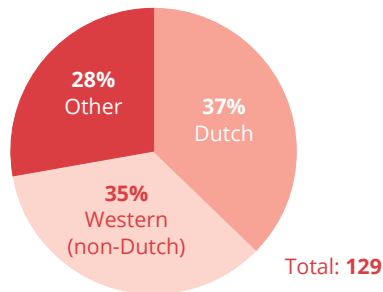
This year, the Royal Academy also published a report on academic freedom:



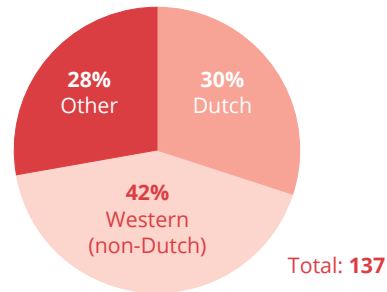
## Becoming More Accessible

Because academics and artists are under pressure in many parts of the world, NIAS has assumed the task of ensuring that our 'haven' for research will be more widely accessible and inclusive. One of NIAS' three goals for 2020-2023 is to attract enough high-quality fellowship applications to be able to build a diverse and balanced year group in terms of discipline, topical relevance, career stage, cultural and geographical background, and gender. Over the coming years extra effort will be made to attract talented scientists and artists from non-Western regions such as Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Latin America. This year, we have seen both an increase in applications as well as in applications from underrepresented regions. ☺

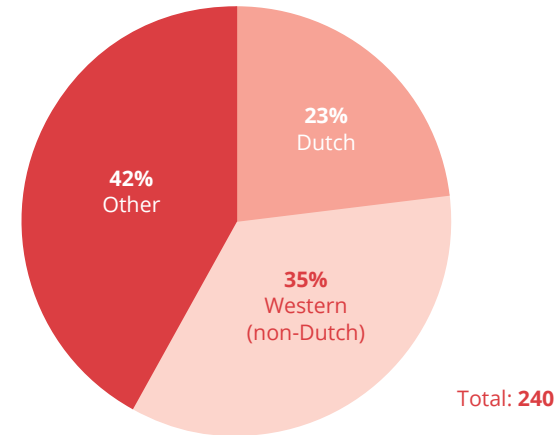
Applications Individual Fellowship 20/21



Applications Individual Fellowship 21/22



Applications Individual Fellowship 22/23




*NIAS is convinced that the best environment to nurture ground-breaking research is characterised by diversity at all levels. This stimulates the re-examination of assumptions, re-evaluation of axioms, critical reflection and transparent, respectful communication – all essential aspects for interdisciplinary cooperation.*




# What's Next?

## Fellows


Next year, from September 2021 until June 2022, NIAS opens its doors to 47 scholars, writers and artists from over twenty disciplines. From refugees to language learning at school, from environmental justice to conspiracy theories.

See the year group overview: 

## Events

- 8 September** | 15.00 – 17.00 Opening of the Academic Year 2021/22, with special attention to NIAS 50 years' anniversary 
- 14 September** | 17.00 -18.30 NIAS Talk “Wondrous Wunderkammers: the Art of Collecting” 
- 15 October** | 16.00 – 18.00 NIAS 50 Years Reunion 
- 17 November** Presentation Literary bundle (in Dutch) *Thuis: Een bloem-lezing over verbondenheid*. With contributions by 13 writers-in-residence

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## Colophon

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**Elin Bjarnegård**; Borders: **Andrea Schatz**

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