

# Fellows 2025/ 2026



# NIAS

Netherlands Institute  
for Advanced Study  
in the Humanities  
and Social Sciences



# Fellows 2025/2026

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# Welcome to NIAS



Jan Willem Duyvendak is director of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (NIAS-KNAW) since 2018, and he is also distinguished Research Professor of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. He received his masters' degrees in both sociology and philosophy at the University of Groningen. His main fields of research currently are citizenship, belonging, and nativism. In 2021 he was elected member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and in 2022 of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His most recent book, with Josip Kesic, is *The Return of the Native. Can Liberalism Safeguard us from Nativism?* (Oxford University Press, 2022). Duyvendak's forthcoming book *Quasi-Cleavages (Spookkloven)*, in which he demonstrates that we are factually far less polarized than we emotionally perceive, will be published in late September 2025 by Thomas Rap.

Susan Holland-Muter planned to study how anti-gender movements impact everyday life through forms of resistance in Brazil and South Africa, focusing on embodied experiences across the body, community, and nation. We were deeply saddened that she passed away before she could take up her fellowship at NIAS. At the same time, we are heartened that her team is continuing the project with dedication, carrying forward her intellectual curiosity and vision.

In this turbulent world, where anti-scholarly voices are loud and science is confronted with skepticism and alternative facts, NIAS is pleased to introduce a new cohort of scholars. Fellows at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study are granted the rare privilege of time—not just to seek answers, but to uncover, both individually and in conversation, deeper questions and remain open to the unexpected.

They create a setting that encourages interdisciplinary collaboration as well as reflection on shared challenges. One such challenge entails the rise of the radical-right and populist attacks on the very foundations of academia. In response, some advocate for broad public involvement in science—consider, for instance, the Dutch Research Agenda (NWA) in which both citizens and politicians were involved. Others seek to show how useful scholarly results are for society.

Yet I believe that the value of science should not be assessed solely through a utilitarian lens. While certain outcomes may directly help counter societal problems, this is neither inherently nor universally true for all forms of scholarly work. Much of the knowledge generated through scientific inquiry is not immediately applicable—nor does it have to be. Fundamental research, in particular, often yields no direct practical outcomes, and many of the most transformative discoveries have emerged not through targeted pursuit, but through serendipity.

By placing greater emphasis on the intrinsic value of research, we can help counterbalance a narrow focus on utility and bolster science's resistance against shifting political winds and a public dismissing it as just another opinion. Thus, the pressing question becomes: how to keep an appropriate distance from political and

citizens' agendas? How to preserve the scholarly autonomy that is essential to the role of academia as a pillar of democracy—a role that must be actively defended?

Keeping an appropriate distance does not mean retreating into an ivory tower. For example, researchers should seek to engage with issues that matter. They should also publicly affirm the distinctive nature and value of academia and the freedoms essential to its impact. NIAS fully embraces this distinctiveness, committed to making academic freedoms both real and lasting.

At NIAS, academic freedom is not merely a principle—it is daily practice. We offer the freedom to think thoroughly, question boldly and create at everyone's highest potential. Fellows, partners and staff reflect critically on the meaning of academic freedom(s), while defending them through public engagement. In the Safe Haven Fellowship Programme, NIAS and partnering universities extend this freedom to scholars at risk—asserting our belief that knowledge must remain borderless.

Jan Willem Duyvendak  
Director NIAS

# 1st semester

## Fellows



**Anna Ciaunica**  
**Ruud Hortensius**  
**Michael Levin**

**Hazem Abu-Orf**  
**Panggah Ardiyansyah**  
**Romy van Baarsen**  
**Rita Baroud**  
**Francesco Battaglia**  
**Aleksandar Bošković**  
**Leandro Matthews Cascon**  
**Ganga Rajinee Dissanayaka**  
**Trang Duong**  
**Ahmed El Shamsy**  
**Marjolijn van Heemstra**  
**Oleksandra Moskalenko**  
**Zehra Ömeroğlu**  
**Rahul Rao**  
**Džemila Šero**  
**Jolene Zigarovich**

# NIAS-Lorentz Theme Group

## Hybrid Agencies: Interacting with biological and artificial systems

Semester 1,  
2025 – 2026

## NIAS-Lorentz Theme Group Hybrid Agencies

**Biological and artificial systems constantly act and interact in the world, changing the world and themselves in the process.**

Nothing is static; all transforms. In recent decades, there has been a significant rise in the development and implementation of artificial agents such as robots, virtual reality characters, and artificial intelligence. This raises foundational questions: Is a body necessary to be *somebody* —a self, an agent? And what exactly constitutes an ‘agent’? The terms *agency* and *agent* are used widely across disciplines—from philosophy to cellular biology, neuroscience, life sciences, and AI—yet there is no shared definition, particularly concerning the distinction between biological and artificial embodiment.

Aligning definitions across disciplines is crucial, as insights are often transferred from one field to another without acknowledging their divergent meanings. This issue becomes even more pressing with the emergence of hybrid systems that combine biological, organic cells with synthetic materials to create new bodies and new forms of life.

The NIAS-Lorentz Theme Group has been formed to explore these complex questions through an interdisciplinary lens. Bringing together an expert international panel, they address a gap that has yet to be tackled within this framework. Their approach is fresh, groundbreaking, and deeply interdisciplinary, integrating perspectives from philosophy, neurobiology, AI, and robotics.

By advancing the creation, understanding, and interaction with artificial and hybrid systems, they aim to reveal deeper insights into the nature of biological living agents—such as humans. This theme group operates within the NIAS-Lorentz Program, which fosters cutting-edge interdisciplinary research bridging the humanities and/or social sciences with the natural and technological sciences.

**Coordinator:** Anna Ciaunica

**Members:** Ruud Hortensius, Michael Levin (Advisor to the NIAS Lorentz Theme Group)



## Anna Ciaunica

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<b>TYPE</b>	<b>SEMESTER</b>
Coordinator of the NIAS Lorentz Theme Group Hybrid Agencies	Semester 1, 2025 – 2026
<b>AFFILIATION</b>	<b>DISCIPLINE</b>
Principal Investigator at the University of Lisbon, Portugal & University College London	cognitive sciences
<b>KEYWORDS</b>	
AI, artificial agents self-consciousness human-agent interaction	

## Interacting with Artificial Selves and Bodies in Natural and Virtual Environments

The past decades have witnessed significant growth in artificial agents including robots, virtual reality characters, and AI systems. We naturally attribute intentionality and social qualities to these agents. However, despite their widespread presence and growing influence on our lives, limited research exists on how these new forms of social interaction impact our self-consciousness, embodiment, and sense of self.

Anna Ciaunica addresses this timely yet neglected issue by assembling an interdisciplinary team of leading experts and emerging researchers in philosophy and neuroscience. The team will specifically examine the differences between social interactions with human versus artificial agents and their effects on our sense of self, embodiment, and self-identity.

Their goal is to demonstrate that comparing self-consciousness and socialness in human-human interaction pairs against human-artificial agent pairs can reveal essential characteristics of human nature and its fundamental components.

The NIAS-Lorentz Theme Group is part of the NIAS-Lorentz Programme, a collaboration between NIAS and the Lorentz Center in Leiden. The center supports scientific communities by organizing innovative international workshops.







*A humanoid robot for medical testing seen at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference 2025 in Shanghai*



## Hybrid Families: Towards an understanding of families in the age of AI

How are AI agents playing an increasingly active role in family life? Should they be seen as objects, pets, siblings, or full family members, and can they unite or divide families? While psychology and social neuroscience typically focus on individuals, Hortensius' research aims to develop a new framework for understanding family dynamics in the age of AI, analysing changes at behavioural and neural levels. Aligned with the three Axes of the Theme Group Hybrid Agencies, it distinguishes biological from artificial family members (Axis 1), studies the evolving integration of AI over time (Axis 2), and examines family hierarchies, co-agency, and the limits of artificial agents within family systems (Axis 3). The project also seeks to inform the design of family-centred AI agents.

## Ruud Hortensius

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**TYPE**  
NIAS Lorentz Theme  
Group Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Associate Professor  
at the department of  
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**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 - 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
psychology

**KEYWORDS**  
social cognition,  
social neuroscience,  
artificial intelligence,  
human-robot  
interaction, group  
and family dynamics



## Hybrid Agencies: Interacting with biological and artificial systems

Michael Levin is advisor to Anna Ciaunica's team studying the question of agency in hybrid evolved and engineered systems. With the Levin lab he integrates approaches from developmental biology, computer science, and cognitive science to investigate the emergence of form and function. Using biophysical and computational modelling approaches, he seeks to understand the collective intelligence of cells, as they navigate physiological, transcriptional, morphogenetic, and behavioral spaces. This NIAS-Lorentz Theme Group will use numerous frameworks to develop conceptual and practical tools to recognise, understand, communicate with, and ethically relate to a wide range of novel beings.

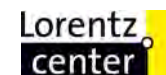
**TYPE**  
Advisor to the NIAS  
Lorentz Theme Group  
Hybrid Agencies

**AFFILIATION**  
Distinguished  
Professor at Tufts  
University

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025–2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
biology, cognitive  
sciences,  
communication  
science, computer  
science, philosophy

**KEYWORDS**  
AI, hybrid agencies



## Michael Levin

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# Hazem Abu-Orf

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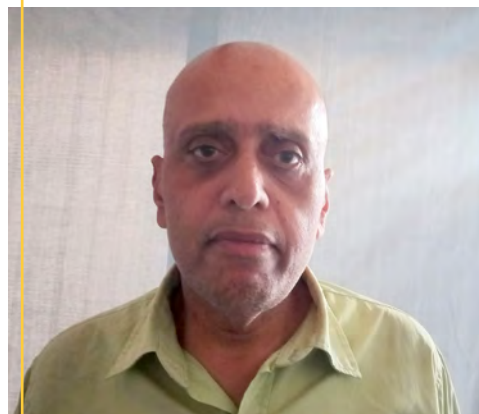
**TYPE**  
Safe Haven Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
architecture

**AFFILIATION**  
Associate Professor  
at the department of  
applied engineering  
and urban planning,  
University of  
Palestine

**KEYWORDS**  
urbanism,  
circular economy,  
sustainability

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 – 2026



## Circular Urbanism in Fragile Contexts

Hazem Abu-Orf's research investigates improvised circular economy (CE) practices in contested cities like Nicosia and Belfast, where conflict and institutional fragmentation have led to low-tech, community-based material flows such as rubble reuse and shared utilities. Challenging mainstream CE models focused on high-tech solutions, his project explores how these conflict-adaptive systems redefine circularity as a survival strategy and inspire governance innovations. Using spatial ethnography and comparative case studies, Abu-Orf maps "resilience corridors"—peri-urban zones where informal material loops enable coexistence. These are contrasted with formal CE hubs, like those in Rotterdam studied by Alexander Wandl, to develop a framework of "conflict-adaptive circularity." Linked to TU Delft's Circular Built Environment Hub, Abu-Orf's research offers fresh perspectives on post-war reconstruction and polarisation in divided cities, bridging urban studies, peacebuilding, and EU sustainability agendas.

The Safe Haven Fellowship supports scholars and cultural actors at risk. It is intended for scholars, artists, writers and journalists who are not able to do their work in their current location or circumstances, because of the consequences of conflict or war. The University of Amsterdam and Maastricht University are partners in the Safe Haven Fellowship Programme.



# Dylan Altamiranda

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**TYPE**  
Nouveau Grand Tour  
Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
art, drawing

**AFFILIATION**  
Artist and  
independent  
researcher

**KEYWORDS**  
drawing, imaginary,  
travel narratives,  
cartography, archives

**SEMESTER**  
Summer stay:  
July 2025



## Navigators' Drawings: Imaginary worlds of the Americas in the Netherlands

Dylan Altamiranda explores images derived from Dutch travel accounts to the Americas during the age of "discovery." Focusing on the Netherlands' traditions of engraving and printing, his research investigates how visual culture shaped colonial imaginaries through travel narratives. By reactivating archival materials through a contemporary drawing practice, Dylan aims to examine these historical images not just as artifacts, but as active agents in the formation of knowledge. Using a travel diary—echoing ancient navigators—he analyses image-making through images themselves, reflecting on their processes, media, representations, and circulation. Special attention is given to maps, situated at the crossroads of text, image, and geography. These serve as palimpsests of the imagined real, layered with specific worldviews and colonial ideologies.

The Nouveau Grand Tour is a research-oriented programme designed for professionalisation of emerging European artists, supported by a network of sixty artistic residencies in France, Italy and the Netherlands. The fellowship gives time and space to research, reflect and connect with fellow artists and local institutions. The Nouveau Grand Tour at NIAS is co-funded by Institut français NL and Stichting France Nederland Cultuurfonds.



# Pangghah Ardiyansyah

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**TYPE**  
NIAS-NIOD-KITLV  
Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
archaeology, art  
history

**AFFILIATION**  
Research Associate  
at the Digital  
Humanities Institute,  
University of  
Sheffield

**KEYWORDS**  
Sendang Duwur,  
heritage politics,  
manuscript  
restitution

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025–2026



## Evocative Fragments: Archaeological knowledge production for Sendang Duwur and its dispersed objects

The research aims to deconstruct the knowledge production of Sendang Duwur, a 16th-century Islamic complex in East Java, Indonesia. In doing so Pangghah Ardiyansyah wants to contribute to the developing scholarship on heritage politics in relation to identity formation, inclusion/exclusion and frameworks of restitution. The project activities are divided into three parts: tracing the relationships between historical figures involved in the circulation of Sendang Duwur manuscripts, reconstructing the interventions of the Archaeological Service of the Dutch East Indies at Sendang Duwur in the first half of the 20th century, and outlining the entangled movements of manuscripts and artefacts associated with the site.



NIAS - NIOD - KITLV Fellowship:  
Moving objects, Mobilising  
Culture in the Context of (De)  
colonisation. This fellowship is  
intended for researchers from  
formerly colonised countries –  
including heritage practitioners,  
historians, archaeologists, social  
scientists, artists, journalists,  
and/or cultural activists – with  
an interest in (lost) collections  
or objects from those countries  
or regions that are kept in the  
Netherlands.

# Romy van Baarsen

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## People and Borders

How did violence at Europe's borders become normalised and which impact does this have on the rule of law when protection turns conditional and violence bureaucratic? Drawing from her experience as a journalist and writer, Romy van Baarsen examines how institutions like Frontex, EU states, and policy frameworks create a complex system where responsibility is often diffuse. Her book combines fieldwork, interviews, document analysis, philosophical reflection, and literary narrative, shifting between narrative and essayistic styles. Central to the work are moral questions about responsibility and the fate of democratic values when principles such as non-refoulement come under pressure. During her time at NIAS, van Baarsen will engage in interdisciplinary dialogue and reflective work to sharpen both the thematic and stylistic aspects of her project.

**TYPE**  
Journalist-in-  
Residence

**AFFILIATION**  
Independent  
researcher and  
journalist

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 - 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
journalism, law,  
non-fiction, public  
administration and  
political science,  
sociology

**KEYWORDS**  
migration, border  
violence, human  
rights

The Journalist-in-Residence Fellowship is for journalists with a keen interest in scholarly research who need an extended period of time to focus on a longer piece of journalistic work. The programme is a collaboration between NIAS and the Fonds Bijzondere Journalistieke Projecten – Foundation for Special Projects in Journalism. This independent foundation aims to support journalists and authors working on time-consuming and in-depth journalistic publications.



# Rita Baroud

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## Citizen Reporting from Gaza: a Lifeline for truth



**TYPE**  
Safe Haven Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
writing, film, journalism

**AFFILIATION**  
Freelance writer and correspondent

**KEYWORDS**  
citizen journalism, Gaza, war reporting

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1, 2025 – 2026

In a context where international media are barred and local outlets are under attack, civilians in Gaza have become indispensable eyewitnesses—documenting events through deeply personal yet factually grounded accounts. This form of citizen journalism, along with the literary essay, is at the heart of what Rita Baroud explores as a NIAS Safe Haven Fellow, examining how these narrative forms emerge and persist under siege.

Rita Baroud investigates how lived experience and proximity to violence shape narrative style, emotional tone, and journalistic credibility. Her research compares content from citizen reporters, local journalists, and Western media, supported by interviews across these groups. This project contributes to debates on objectivity, distance, and the boundary between journalism and literature. Alongside her research, Baroud is developing her own essays, offering a unique perspective as a young Palestinian woman reporting from within Gaza.

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# Towards an Embodied Theory of Brain Function



## Francesco Battaglia

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**TYPE**  
Distinguished NIAS Lorentz Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
neuroscience, neurotechnology

**AFFILIATION**  
Professor of theoretical and systems neuroscience at Radboud University

**KEYWORDS**  
embodied cognition, sensorimotor integration, theoretical neuroscience

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1, 2025 – 2026

Most modern neuroscience is based on the idea that the brain represents information about the external world and processes it much like a computer, using concepts such as statistical inference, neural representations, predictive coding, and action optimisation. While this model has generated valuable descriptive knowledge—especially with the aid of new experimental techniques—it is increasingly seen as insufficient for developing a full theory of the brain. The “brain as a computer” view overlooks the crucial role of the body in shaping brain function. Interactions with the world are always mediated by the body. Francesco Battaglia proposes that all brain activity—from emotion and interoception to cognition—emerges from patterns rooted in brain-body interactions. His project will draw on his expertise in experimental and theoretical neuroscience and neurotechnology to help build a new theory of the brain grounded in these embodied dynamics.



The Distinguished NIAS-Lorentz Fellowship is awarded to an eminent scientist working on research that brings together perspectives from the Humanities and/or Social Sciences on the one hand and the Natural Sciences and/or Technology on the other. The fellowship is part of the NIAS-Lorentz Program, a collaboration between NIAS and the Lorentz Center in Leiden. The center supports scientific communities by organizing innovative international workshops.



# Aleksandar Bošković

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## Nothing :) Made in Yugoslavia

Aleksandar Bošković studies experimental art from the former Yugoslavia, focusing on how these creative practices - across literature, film, visual arts, and radio - express decolonial aesthetics and its radical epistemologies. At the core of these practices is a compelling idea: that “nothing” can help us rethink how value is created. His research demonstrates how, using techniques of refusal and negation, Yugoslav artists reframe the question of value and offer new ways of imagining future cultural narratives. Radical Yugoslav art practices, Bošković argues, remind us that the same principle applies to both post-Balkan and European contexts: such a culture is founded not on identity but on responsibility.

**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Senior Lecturer at  
Columbia University

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
cultural analysis,  
media studies

**KEYWORDS**  
experimental art,  
Yugoslavia, negation,  
conceptual art,  
avant-garde,  
meady-rade

## Cultivating Objects: Connecting indigenous cassava agriculture of Suriname to its materialities through a study of colonial collections in the Netherlands

**TYPE**  
NIAS-NIOD-KITLV  
Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Postdoctoral  
researcher at  
the Institute  
of Archaeology  
and Cultural  
Anthropology of the  
University of Bonn

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025–2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
anthropology,  
archaeology

**KEYWORDS**  
cassava,  
Indigenous  
agricultural  
knowledge,  
agriculture,  
material culture



## Leandro Matthews Cascon

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How can museum objects, related to cassava cultivation and consumption, offer insight into Indigenous agricultural knowledge in Suriname over time? Leandro Matthews Cascon's research focuses on artefacts connected to the agricultural practices of Surinamese Indigenous groups held in colonial collections in Dutch museums. By highlighting the colonial impact on food security and production, Cascon contrasts traditional Indigenous perspectives on plant cultivation—shaped by affective relationships, reciprocity, and familiarity—with the Dutch colonial view, which saw agriculture as a tool for economic gain and market-driven production. Viewing traditional agriculture as cultural heritage, his work contributes to Indigenous communities' goals, promotes greater access to their historical collections, and supports sustainable, culturally rooted livelihoods.



NIAS - NIOD - KITLV Fellowship:  
Moving objects, Mobilising  
Culture in the Context of (De)  
colonisation. This fellowship is  
intended for researchers from  
formerly colonised countries –  
including heritage practitioners,  
historians, archaeologists, social  
scientists, artists, journalists,  
and/or cultural activists – with  
an interest in (lost) collections  
or objects from those countries  
or regions that are kept in the  
Netherlands.

# Ganga Rajinee Dissanayaka

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**TYPE**  
NIAS-NIOD-KITLV  
Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Independent  
researcher

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
anthropology,  
cultural analysis,  
history

**KEYWORDS**  
Sri Lankan ivory  
artefacts, provenance  
and restitution,  
decolonising  
museum practices



## Transcending Borders: Cultural mobility in motion

Focusing on Sri Lankan ivory boxes, jewellery, and statues in the Rijksmuseum and the Wereldmuseum in the Netherlands, Ganga Rajinee Dissanayaka's research examines their historical journeys, political contexts, social impact, and aesthetic value to inform discussions on cultural mobility, provenance, and restitution. Using a multidisciplinary approach—material analysis, iconographic interpretation, and object-based study—she uncovers the layered histories of these artefacts and situates them within broader historical and cultural settings, tracing their interactions with individuals, communities, and institutions.

Her work addresses colonial legacies in museum collections and contributes to debates on Sri Lanka's socio-political past, cultural justice, and ethical heritage management. By engaging with restitution discussions, Dissanayaka promotes decolonising museum practices and fosters dialogue between Sri Lanka and the Netherlands, highlighting heritage's crucial role in collective memory and social cohesion.



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scientists, artists, journalists,  
and/or cultural activists – with  
an interest in (lost) collections  
or objects from those countries  
or regions that are kept in the  
Netherlands.

# Trang Duong

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## How Knowledge on Past Coastal Flood Events can Help Shape a Safer Future for Coastal Communities.



The Dutch L'Oréal-UNESCO  
For Women in Science  
Fellowship program  
promotes the scientific  
career of talented young  
women in Life Sciences with  
the aim of increasing the  
number of female professors  
in the Netherlands. The  
fellowship is a national  
initiative within the  
international For Women in  
Science program, sponsored  
by L'Oréal and UNESCO  
and supported by NEMO  
Science Museum and the  
National Network of Women  
Professors (LNVH).



**TYPE**  
L'Oréal-UNESCO For  
Women in Science  
Fellow

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 – 2026

**AFFILIATION**  
Assistant Professor  
in Civil Engineering  
& Management  
Department at the  
University of Twente  
& Senior Lecturer in  
Coastal and Urban  
Risk & Resilience  
Department at IHE  
Delft Institute for  
Water Education.

**DISCIPLINE**  
coastal engineering,  
engineering

**KEYWORDS**  
flood, coastal  
communities,  
extreme sea levels,  
climate change,  
sustainability

Coastal flooding caused by extreme sea levels (ESL)—a combination of sea-level rise, tides, storm surges, and wave effects—is a major threat to coastal communities, leading to property damage, infrastructure loss, and fatalities.

With climate change accelerating, such events are expected to become far more frequent and severe. The IPCC's AR6 report confirms, with high confidence, that coastal flooding will intensify globally by mid-century, highlighting the urgent need for adaptation.

Trang Duong's research focuses on future flood impacts from extreme events like storm Xynthia, which caused devastating flooding in France in 2010. Using advanced numerical modelling, she examines the likely damage if such a storm occurred again and assesses the effectiveness of additional flood protection measures.

Her work will aid policymakers and local stakeholders in developing climate-resilient strategies and contribute to global efforts to adapt to climate change.

# Ahmed El Shamsy

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The academic study of Islam classifies most Muslims today as Sunnis, yet many do not self-identify this way, and the term itself lacks a clear definition. It is unclear whether Sunnism refers to a theology, a political or religious stance, adherence to one of the four Sunni legal schools, or merely a residual label for Muslims outside other categories. Questions remain as to whether Sunnism is a sect, a denomination, or something else entirely, especially given Islam's lack of a central religious authority. Ahmed El Shamsy's project does not aim to define "true" Sunnism but to explore what it meant in specific historical contexts, particularly for those who claimed the label. He focuses on the early, often overlooked history of Sunnism, which is key to understanding the internal debates and tensions that later Sunnis faced in reconciling their diverse heritage.

## The Early History of Sunni Islam

**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Professor of Islamic Thought at the University of Chicago

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
history, religious studies and theology

**KEYWORDS**  
Sunnism, Islam, community formation, theology

# Marjolijn van Heemstra

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## The Art of Dusking: Reviving the forgotten practice of watching the world go dark



Dusking is a poetic, journalistic reflection on the contemporary relevance of a forgotten Dutch ritual: sitting and watching the day turn into night. This project centres on the theme of attention. While society often discusses an "attention crisis" affecting individuals overwhelmed by constant stimuli, the project highlights how this lack of attention disconnects us from the physical world and natural rhythms. Today, many struggle to recognise common birds or orient themselves geographically. Marjolijn van Heemstra's project explores how this old ritual can help redirect attention outward, restoring connection with our surroundings. She investigates how twilight reveals the world as a process rather than just facts and suggests dusking as a practice in noticing subtle changes and gradients in the environment.

**TYPE**  
Writer-in-Residence

**AFFILIATION**  
Writer and journalist at *De Correspondent*

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025–2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
cultural analysis, journalism, literature, religious studies and theology

**KEYWORDS**  
ritual, attention, connection, process, poetry, darkness, rhythm

**Nederlands Letterenfonds dutch foundation for literature**

The Writer-in-Residence programme is a cooperation between NIAS and Nederlands Letterenfonds – the Dutch Foundation for Literature. The foundation is committed to contribute to a well-read, intelligent and creative society in which the role of literature, writers and translators, is recognized and valued. This fellowship aims to allow writers of fiction and non-fiction to work within an international, interdisciplinary academic community.



## Fiscal and Monetary Policies in Wartime Ukraine: Was it the path to a resilient economy with international assistance?



## Oleksandra Moskalenko

[alexi.moskalenko@gmail.com](mailto:alexi.moskalenko@gmail.com)

## Zehra Ömeroğlu

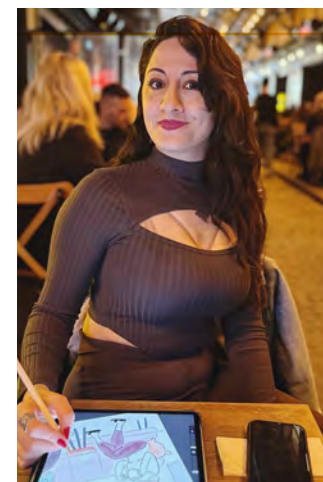
[zehraomerovna@gmail.com](mailto:zehraomerovna@gmail.com)

## The Case: a Graphic novel on censorship, resilience and artistic resistance in the face of political repression

The Case is a personal graphic novel by Zehra Ömeroğlu that explores censorship, freedom of expression, and the resilience of artists under pressure.

Drawing on her experience as a political cartoonist prosecuted in Turkey for a satirical cartoon, Ömeroğlu shows how humour can be both a target and a tool in authoritarian regimes. Using visual storytelling, the work contrasts harsh repression with the surreal logic of the legal system. The narrative traces a path from public defamation and legal persecution to international solidarity, forced relocation, and artistic reinvention.

Set across Turkey, Georgia, and Germany, The Case speaks to the global erosion of artistic freedom and the enduring power of satire as resistance. It questions who defines offence and how creativity survives—or adapts—under pressure, blending irony, documentary realism, and emotional depth to reflect on the changing boundaries of dissent.



The Safe Haven Fellowship supports scholars and cultural actors at risk. It is intended for scholars, artists, writers and journalists who are not able to do their work in their current location or circumstances, because of the consequences of conflict or war. The University of Amsterdam and Maastricht University are partners in the Safe Haven Fellowship Programme.



Willem F. Duisenberg Fellowship Foundation

This fellowship is named in honour of Willem F. Duisenberg, first President of the European Central Bank. It offers researchers in applied monetary economics, macroeconomics, or public finance the chance to conduct independent research within a transdisciplinary environment at NIAS. Fellows also engage with Dutch academics, policymakers, and financial representatives. The fellowship, established in 2007, is supported by De Nederlandsche Bank, the Dutch Ministry of Finance, and major Dutch financial institutions (ING Group, Rabobank Nederland, ABN-AMRO and AEGON).

**TYPE**  
Duisenberg Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Visiting Professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025–2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
economics, fiscal  
and monetary policy

**KEYWORDS**  
Ukraine, resilient  
economy, monetary  
and fiscal policies  
during wartime

Oleksandra Moskalenko's research investigates fiscal and monetary policy responses to war shocks in Ukraine, addressing a gap in literature on managing economic policies during conflict. The study analyses the effectiveness of measures taken after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, assessing whether these policies were optimal or reactive. It examines key decisions by Ukrainian authorities to support the economy and maintain macro-financial stability amid internal and external challenges. The project also explores the role of international financial aid and compares Ukraine's responses with those of the EU, UK, and USA. Despite GDP contraction, infrastructure damage, and inflation, the economy has shown resilience.

Using a New Keynesian model, Moskalenko evaluates how fiscal loosening and unconventional monetary policies affected economic variables, aiming to offer insights for policymakers navigating wartime economic management.

**TYPE**  
Safe Haven Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
art, journalism

**AFFILIATION**  
Independent  
cartoonist

**KEYWORDS**  
cartoons, editorial  
cartoon, political  
cartoons, journalism,  
graphic novel

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 - 2026

**TYPE**  
Nouveau Grand Tour  
Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
anthropology, art,  
film

**AFFILIATION**  
Independent  
filmmaker and artist

**KEYWORDS**  
film, colonialism,  
benevolence,  
regeneration

**SEMESTER**  
Summer stay:  
July 2025

# Ugo Petronin

[ugopetronin@hotmail.com](mailto:ugopetronin@hotmail.com)



## Benevolences: Regeneration ideal in colonial practices

Benevolences is a fiction film project exploring the ideological entanglements of benevolence, regeneration, and colonialism. Grounded in historical research, it investigates how these ideals were deployed in domestic colonial projects to reform and control marginalized populations. The film centers on the Dutch Colonies of Benevolence, a 19th-century initiative combining agricultural labour with moral rehabilitation. It examines the ethical contradictions of such institutions, where care coexisted with coercion, and reform was bound to spatial and social segregation. Rather than a historical reenactment, Benevolences explores the emotional and ideological afterlives of these systems, tracing their echoes in contemporary values, narratives, and social practices. It interrogates how colonial logics and paternalistic ideals continue to influence present-day notions of welfare, regeneration, and order.

The Nouveau Grand Tour is a research-oriented programme designed for professionalisation of emerging European artists, supported by a network of sixty artistic residencies in France, Italy and the Netherlands. The fellowship gives time and space to research, reflect and connect with fellow artists and local institutions. The Nouveau Grand Tour at NIAS is co-funded by Institut français NL and Stichting France Nederland Cultuurfonds.



Whales occupy an unstable position in sociopolitical thought. Seen as Leviathan—the sea monster—they symbolize absolute surrender to God in the Book of Job and to the state in Hobbes's work. Yet, whales were also industrial capitalism's resource, hunted to near extinction. Since the whaling moratorium, former hunting societies now view whales as symbols of intelligence and emotion, echoing Indigenous cosmologies that long centred them. Whales challenge humanist and posthumanist categories, appearing subhuman, human, and more-than-human simultaneously. Drawing on the more-than-human turn in humanities and queer and trans studies, Rahul Rao explores how taking whales' strivings seriously unsettles social and political thought. He investigates how human-whale interactions have forced a revision and reconception of worldmaking projects, questioning core assumptions in these fields.

## What Whales Want: a Whale- oriented world order

# Rahul Rao

[rr213@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:rr213@st-andrews.ac.uk)



**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
gender studies,  
international  
relations, political  
science

**AFFILIATION**  
Reader in  
International Political  
Thought, University  
of St Andrews

**KEYWORDS**  
whales,  
entanglement,  
transition,  
posthumanism

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 – 2026

**TYPE**  
L'Oréal-UNESCO For  
Women in Science  
Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Assistant Professor  
at University of  
Twente

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
computer science,  
engineering,  
technology

**KEYWORDS**  
artificial intelligence,  
cultural heritage,  
fingerprint  
biometrics,  
terracotta sculpture  
analysis



# Džemila Šero

[d.sero@utwente.nl](mailto:d.sero@utwente.nl)

## Heritage Biometrics - AI for the analysis of fingerprints on artworks

The largely untapped role of artificial intelligence (AI) in cultural heritage is explored by Džemila Šero's research which focuses on fingerprints left on 17th-century terracotta sculptures, such as those by Artus I Quellinus and his workshop. These fingerprints offer a tangible link between artists and their creations.

Šero has developed a 3D micro-CT imaging method to capture and study these delicate marks, allowing her to estimate an artist's age and sex and verify museum attributions. However, manually identifying fingerprints is slow and many are incomplete, so her project investigates whether AI can automatically detect fingerprints on sculptures and reconstruct partial prints using deep learning.

By applying biometric techniques to terracotta, she aims to advance forensic science and cultural heritage research. Her work creates a profound human connection by revealing artists' "silent signatures" centuries later.

The Dutch L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Fellowship program promotes the scientific career of talented young women in Life Sciences with the aim of increasing the number of female professors in the Netherlands. The fellowship is a national initiative within the international For Women in Science program, sponsored by L'Oréal and UNESCO and supported by NEMO Science Museum and the National Network of Women Professors (LNVH).



This project argues that the female body—central to birthright and legitimacy—is used as extra-legal evidence in eighteenth-century courts and British novels. Jolene Zigarovich highlights court cases where female emotion, resemblance, and virtue influence legal proceedings and judgments.

Jolene Zigarovich' project traces a shift in the late eighteenth century, when women's legal success declined, and narrative jurisprudence responded by portraying women inheriting and claiming birthright through private means. Zigarovich claims that, unlike the law, fiction more often offered women agency and private identity.

Using law and affect theory, her book's chapters explore how female novelists rework the emotional and coercive aspects of birthright and inheritance cases, suggesting narrative becomes a space where women act as legal and moral agents more reliably than in law.

## Legal Bodies: Women, economies, and the law in the eighteenth-century novel

**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
english literature

**AFFILIATION**  
Associate Professor  
of English at the  
University of  
Northern Iowa

**KEYWORDS**  
eighteenth-century  
novel, courts, women  
writers, inheritance,  
birthright, bodies,  
affect theory, legal  
history

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 1,  
2025 - 2026

# Jolene Zigarovich

[jolene.zigarovich@uni.edu](mailto:jolene.zigarovich@uni.edu)





**Felicity Apaah  
Roxana Coman  
Ngozika Anthonia Obi-Ani  
Areej Sabbagh-Khoury  
Timothy Stacey**

# Fellows

# full year



# Felicity Apaah

[feliabraham@yahoo.com](mailto:feliabraham@yahoo.com)

## Nana Kow Ackon V: the Making of a ‘Woman King’ in Ghana

Felicity Apaah’s research uses the biography of Nana Kow Ackon V, Senior Divisional Chief of the Cape Coast Traditional Area and one of only ten female chiefs in Ghana, to explore female traditional authority and the spiritual female principle in a matrilineal society. It places these within Ghana’s wider patriarchal context. Historically, women and the spiritual female principle held central roles in pre-colonial West African political and spiritual life, but colonial rule severely diminished their influence. In Akan tradition, political authority is symbolised by two stools: one for the male chief and one for the Queen Mother. While male chieftaincy dominates in Ghana, some Akan societies recognise women as chiefs. Nana Kow Ackon V embodies this rare tradition, showing how traditional knowledge and spiritual values continue to shape contemporary views on female leadership and the spiritual female principle in Ghana.

**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Lecturer at the  
University of Ghana

**SEMESTER**  
Full academic year  
2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
gender studies,  
religious studies and  
theology

**KEYWORDS**  
women chiefs,  
spiritual authority,  
Ghana, matriarchal  
setting, Akan society

**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Independent  
researcher

**SEMESTER**  
Full academic year  
2025 - 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
area studies,  
art history

**KEYWORDS**  
British Mandate  
Jerusalem,  
dissolution of empire

## Collecting Islamic Artefacts and Searching for a National Identity in British Mandate Jerusalem: Marcu Beza between neo Byzantinism and Exoticism.

# Roxana Coman

[roxana.coman@rocketmail.com](mailto:roxana.coman@rocketmail.com)



Focusing on the largely overlooked private collection of Marcu Beza, Romanian General Consul in Jerusalem during the interwar period, Roxana Coman’s research engages with museum histories, provenance, and decolonisation. Beza’s collection, displayed in his Jerusalem quarters, includes textiles, metalwork, religious objects (Islamic and Orthodox Christian), furniture, jewellery, and watercolours, gathered across Asia Minor, Mount Athos, Istanbul, Cyprus, and Mount Sinai. Using archival research alongside museum and critical heritage studies, Coman examines Beza as an intermediary operating within (post)imperial Ottoman spaces. Her work reveals how this material culture uncovers narratives of mobility, nation-building, inter-imperial exchange, and lasting imperial legacies.

**stias**  
STELLENBOSCH  
INSTITUTE FOR  
ADVANCED STUDY

Iso Lomso Fellowships enable Fellows to develop a long-term research project of their preference. Aim: facilitate and support them in becoming established scholars in their fields. Iso Lomso means 'eye of tomorrow' in isiXhosa: seeing towards the future, laying foundations for tomorrow. The Fellowship is aimed at African scholars with an academic position at a university or research institution anywhere in Africa.

**TYPE**  
Iso Lomso Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Senior Lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka

**SEMESTER**  
Full academic year 2025–2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
history

**KEYWORDS**  
Igbo, Nigeria, Biafra, cultural memory, civil war

# Ngozika Anthonia Obi-Ani

[ngoziak.obi-ani@unn.edu.ng](mailto:ngoziak.obi-ani@unn.edu.ng)

## Cultural Memory and the Legacy of the Nigeria-Biafra War in Southeast Nigeria



How have successive generations of Biafran war survivors—including those who did not directly experience the conflict— inherited and internalised memories passed down through their families? The Nigerian-Biafran Civil War (1967-1970), fought between the Nigerian state and the Igbo ethnic group, created a historical trauma deeply embedded in collective memory and resonating across generations. Obi-Ani examines how the war's effects have been transmitted, prompting post-war Biafran generations to feel a personal connection to this traumatic past. The project investigates how these generations cope with the war's legacies and the contestations surrounding their memory reconstructions. Adopting a decolonial perspective, Obi-Ani focuses on cultural elements like names, music, and art that resisted enforced amnesia, becoming sites of memory that challenge dominant silences and preserve alternative narratives.

Rooted in political and historical sociology, Areej Sabbagh-Khoury's project examines the intersection of political economy and settler colonial governmentality regarding Palestinian citizens in Israel. Though granted citizenship since Israel's founding, Palestinians have faced ongoing socio-political and economic marginalisation. The study explores how this marginalisation shapes their strategies in an increasingly exclusionary society, despite recent claims of economic "inclusion." It addresses a key question: how does the Israeli state govern its Palestinian minority amid a seeming contradiction between exclusionary settler colonial policies and substantial economic investment? Using a multi-method approach, Sabbagh-Khoury investigates three main developments: extensive state investment in Palestinian communities, the rise of ethno-nationalist policies, and increased Palestinian civic and political engagement. The research includes interviews with Palestinian and Jewish Israeli leaders, analysis of investment initiatives (such as GR-922), reviews of Knesset policies, and discourse analysis of Arabic and Hebrew media. By linking political economy with broader social and political dynamics, the study offers fresh insights into the complex modes of governance shaping the lives of Palestinians in Israel.

**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley

**SEMESTER**  
Full academic year 2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
sociology

**KEYWORDS**  
settler colonialism, Palestinians, political economy, Israeli state

# Areej Sabbagh-Khoury

[areejsabbagh@berkeley.edu](mailto:areejsabbagh@berkeley.edu)

[areej.sabbagh-khoury@mail.huji.ac.il](mailto:areej.sabbagh-khoury@mail.huji.ac.il)

## Settler Colonial Citizenship Between Ethno-Nationalist and Neoliberal Governmentality: the Case of the Palestinians in Israel





**TYPE**

Coordinator of the  
NIAS Theme Group  
Ecology of Belonging

**AFFILIATION**

Researcher and  
Lecturer at the Urban  
Futures Studio of  
Utrecht University

**SEMESTER**

Full academic year  
2025 - 2026

**DISCIPLINE**

anthropology,  
cultural analysis,  
environmental  
science, geography,  
religious studies and  
theology, sociology

**KEYWORDS**

religion, theatre,  
politics, environment

# Timothy Stacey

[t.j.stacey@uu.nl](mailto:t.j.stacey@uu.nl)



## A Future we Can Belong to

The link between ecology and belonging is often overlooked in sustainability debates, yet it plays a key role in motivating environmental action and features strongly in the views of those rejecting green agendas.

Timothy Stacey argues that we urgently need new understandings of belonging. His project combines social scientific and journalistic methods to examine how belonging is currently addressed in environmental futures and to identify compelling examples where belonging connects people to nature, speaks across diverse groups, and remains open to newcomers.

In the early phase of the project, such cases will be identified. After that, they will serve as “boundary objects”, enabling Stacey and his theme group to ground theoretical discussions in practical realities and contribute to improving people’s lived realities.

# 2nd semester

## Fellows

**Timothy Stacey**  
**Tanja van Hummel**  
**Shivant Jhagroe**  
**Jacob McLean**  
**Stanzin Namgail**

**Katerina Manevska**  
**Mark Brandt**  
**Paul Vinod Khiatani**

**Hayal Akarsu**  
**Hilde Bras**  
**Tita Chico**  
**Arjen De Wit**  
**Jolien Francken**  
**Cecilia Hendrikx**  
**Femke Roosma**  
**Philip Schleifer**  
**Iris Walraven**  
**Rebecca Wynter**

In the second semester,  
three additional Safe Haven  
Fellows and a journalist-  
in-residence will join our  
community; their names will  
be announced once selected.

# NIAS Theme Group

## Ecology and Belonging: in Search of a new political space

**Semester 2,  
2025 – 2026**

## NIAS Theme Group Ecology and Belonging

Those tasked with mapping the environmental future have lost the language of belonging. Meanwhile, those telling the most convincing stories of belonging are closing borders and ignoring warnings of ecological catastrophe.

In this context, the Ecology and Belonging Theme Group explores ways of conceiving and performing belonging that are profound enough to connect people to the environment, inspiring enough to transcend political divisions, and open enough to embrace newcomers.

To meet these ambitious aims, they have boldly brought together scholars from very different disciplines and regional contexts, whose specialist knowledge addresses the ideologically diverse groups that must be engaged: indigenous peoples; deep ecology; decolonial perspectives; conservatism; and eco-fascism.

To ensure meaningful dialogue and direct contributions to society, they will work and think alongside a series of Dutch and international projects.

A profound question will permeate their discussions: must any conception of belonging be diluted to include newcomers, or can belonging be conceived in a way that is simultaneously deeply meaningful and radically open?

*Coordinator:* Timothy Stacey (full year fellow)

*Members:* Tanja van Hummel, Jacob McLean, Shivan Jhagroe, Stanzin Namgail



How do people connect with both nature and their communities? Building on earlier research into how religious beliefs shape Dutch climate debates, Tanja van Hummel examined how dairy farmers engage with land, culture, and environmental care. In north-east Twente, farmers showed a deep attachment to place and community, living by values drawn from Catholic Social Teaching. They emphasised mutual support, solidarity, and the bonum commune—a society where all can flourish—favouring decision-making at local levels through the principle of subsidiarity. In contrast, farmers in the Food Valley were less connected to place but more explicit in their ecological views. In this project, Van Hummel investigates whether the concept of bonum commune can be expanded into a sustainable bonum commune, one that includes both a thriving environment and community, encouraging deeper ecological and social integration.

## Tanja van Hummel

[t.m.van.hummel@rug.nl](mailto:t.m.van.hummel@rug.nl)

### TYPE

NIAS Theme Group  
Fellow

### DISCIPLINE

religion studies,  
religious studies and  
theology

### AFFILIATION

PhD candidate  
Faculty of Religion,  
Culture, and Society  
at Groningen  
University

### KEYWORDS

climate-related  
conflict, agriculture,  
farming, nitrogen  
crisis, worldview  
studies

### SEMESTER

Semester 2,  
2025 - 2026

Towards a  
Sustainable,  
Harmonious,  
and Open Bonum  
Commune





*Ukrainian refugees on the side of the road*



**TYPE**  
NIAS Theme Group  
Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Assistant Professor  
at the faculty of  
Governance and  
Global Affairs, Leiden  
University

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2,  
2025 - 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
public administration  
and political science,  
anthropology,  
environmental  
science, philosophy

**KEYWORDS**  
sustainability,  
governance,  
climate justice,  
posthumanism,  
decolonisation



## Deep Ecology, Decolonisation and Belonging

# Shivant Jhagroe

[s.s.jhagroe@fgga.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:s.s.jhagroe@fgga.leidenuniv.nl)

Critically examining deep ecology, posthumanism, and new materialism, Shivant Jhagroe's research project traces the entangled relationships between humans, land, and water while recognising the value and agency of non-human life. However, these approaches often overlook the privilege involved in engaging with the more-than-human world. Jhagroe aims to decolonise the posthuman on three levels. First, he explores how dispossession and land access shape our responsibility towards nature. Second, he critiques the ideal of 'pure and untouched nature' in deep ecology, revealing how it often coincides with land dispossession. Third, he addresses how colonial dispossession has displaced many people to Global North countries, where they face exclusion from wealth and land ownership. The project investigates 'eco-belonging' in the Global North through a decolonial lens, focusing on lived experience, cultural narratives, and political agency.

## Ecology and Belonging: in Search of a progressive narrative

**TYPE**  
NIAS Theme Group  
Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Independent  
researcher

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2,  
2025–2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
geography, sociology

**KEYWORDS**  
fossil capitalism, the  
far right, populism



# Jacob McLean

[jacobmclean92@hotmail.com](mailto:jacobmclean92@hotmail.com)

This theme group starts from the premise that those best equipped to envisage a just and sustainable future are proving least capable of speaking convincingly about meaning and belonging. Meanwhile, those resisting societal transformation share a narrative core: meaning and identity are under threat and must be restored. Progressives have proved staunchly resistant to taking this narrative at face value. Instead, they demonise people for clutching at apparently archaic forms of meaning in a rapidly changing world. And they double down on technocratic politics. The result? Divides deepen, and nativists continue banging at the doors of power. Against this backdrop, our aim is to explore possibilities for a progressive narrative of ecology and belonging that can draw support across the political spectrum. To do so, we take a bold turn: we draw together experts on ecology and belonging among the technocratic left; the far right; conservatives; indigenous peoples; and deep ecologists. The challenge is to find meanings as profound as those provided by indigenous peoples and deep ecologists, with the mass appeal of nativism, but the openness and geopolitical sobriety of cosmopolitanism.

# Stanzin Namgail

[stanzinnamgail@uol.ac.in](mailto:stanzinnamgail@uol.ac.in)



## Indigenous Perspectives on the Relationship between Ecology and Belonging in the Himalaya

### TYPE

NIAS Theme Group Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
sociology

### AFFILIATION

Assistant Professor of Sociology at Eliezer Joldan Memorial College, University of Ladakh

### KEYWORDS

tribal studies, pastoralism, nomadic, Himalayan ecology

### SEMESTER

Semester 2, 2025 - 2026

Stanzin Namgail's research explores the deep links between ecology, culture, and belonging within the Changpa pastoralist community of the Ladakh Himalaya. As a member of this Indigenous nomadic group, he combines personal and scholarly insights into a worldview where the land is sacred, more-than-human beings are kin, and survival depends on reciprocal care for fragile high-altitude ecosystems. However, climate change, market pressures, and formal education marginalising Indigenous languages and knowledge have caused growing disconnection, especially among younger generations. This threatens cultural continuity and longstanding sustainable resource management systems. Using ethnographic research, oral history, and participatory methods, Namgail documents how Changpa cosmologies and ecological practices have evolved and continue to shape collective identity. The project also considers how these traditions can inform wider debates on ecological ethics, education, and sustainability.

# NIAS Theme Group

## Why do Adults Change their Beliefs?

Semester 2,  
2025 – 2026



## NIAS Theme Group

### Why do Adults Change their Beliefs?

**Building a research infrastructure for the cross-national study of adult belief change.**

Across the world, societies are undergoing rapid and widespread shifts in what adults believe. People are embracing new and evolving conspiracy theories, growing disillusioned with politics—as seen in waves of anti-government protests—and re-examining views on institutional racism, as reflected in the global Black Lives Matter movements. From a social science perspective, these sudden changes are striking, as adults typically do not alter their political beliefs quickly or easily. Traditionally, shifts in public attitudes have been attributed to generational turnover, with younger cohorts introducing new values and perspectives into political and cultural spheres. However, the pace of recent belief changes suggests that additional processes are at work—processes operating at the level of individuals rather than solely across generations. Despite growing evidence, belief change in adulthood remains an underexplored area. This is largely due to the enduring assumption that political attitudes are shaped early in life and tend to remain stable. While some recent research has shown that adults can and do revise their beliefs, it often falls short of identifying when, why, or how such changes occur. To address this gap, the research undertaken by this theme group will investigate how belief change happens in adulthood, who is most likely to undergo such change, and the conditions that make it possible. By employing new theoretical and methodological approaches, they seek to establish a meaningful research agenda around a phenomenon that is both timely and socially significant.

*Coordinator:* Katerina Manevska  
*Members:* Mark Brandt, Paul Vinod Khatani

#### TYPE

Coordinator of the  
NIAS Theme Group  
Adult Belief Change

#### AFFILIATION

Assistant Professor  
in Cultural and  
Political Sociology  
at Nijmegen School  
of Management,  
Department of  
Political Science,  
Radboud University

#### SEMESTER

Semester 2,  
2025–2026

#### DISCIPLINE

political sociology

#### KEYWORDS

belief change,  
societal conditions,  
identity

## Katerina Manevska

[katerina.manevska@ru.nl](mailto:katerina.manevska@ru.nl)

### Understanding Adult Belief Change: the Interplay between individual and societal conditions



Under what individual and societal conditions do adults change their beliefs? In this project, Katerina Manevska investigates belief change in relation to four key issues: institutional trust, ethnic outgroups, gender identities, and economic redistribution. She uses panel data from six different countries and combines these with data on societal characteristics such as issue salience and policy change. Manevska's project will benefit from the theoretical and empirical work of the theme group project *Why do adults change their beliefs?* It will add to the group project by theorising and testing the role of individual factors, to get a better understanding of when, where and for which groups of people belief change throughout adulthood is likely to take place.





*Discussion among Amsterdam residents on the Linnaeusstraat shortly after the murder of Theo van Gogh*



# Mark Brandt

[brandt15@msu.edu](mailto:brandt15@msu.edu)

People experience threatening life events. Relationships crumble, jobs are lost, terrorists attack, and loved ones pass away. The purpose of this project is to comprehensively map how these threatening life experiences affect political preferences. Mark Brandt studies how a wide range of real-life experiences predict stability and change in political preferences. Comprehensively mapping how threat impacts political preferences is important for understanding the dynamics of political preferences. This has direct implications for theories of political attitudes, but also for understanding how societies respond to both personal and societal crisis.

## A Comprehensive Map of the Threat-Politics Relationship



**TYPE**  
NIAS Theme Group Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
psychology

**AFFILIATION**  
Associate Professor of Psychology at Michigan State University

**KEYWORDS**  
political preferences, ideology, threat, life experiences, attitude change

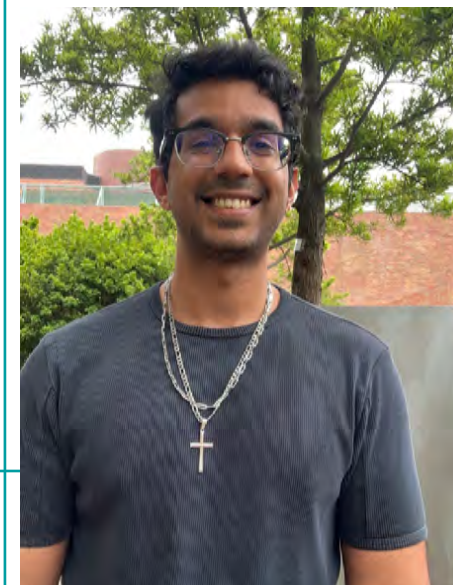
**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2, 2025–2026

## Why do Adults Change their Beliefs? Building a Research Infrastructure for a Cross-National Study

Belief change later in life remains an understudied phenomenon, as it challenges the long-held assumption that political attitudes are formed early and remain relatively stable. While recent studies have documented instances of belief change among adults, they tend to be largely descriptive, offering limited insight into the underlying mechanisms. In other words, we know that such change can occur—but we lack understanding of when, why, or how it happens. Paul Khiatani will explore these questions together with the other members of his theme group. By employing new theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches, this initiative aims to establish a robust research agenda on this significant topic.

# Paul Vinod Khiatani

[paul-vinod.khiatani@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:paul-vinod.khiatani@polyu.edu.hk)



**TYPE**  
NIAS Theme Group Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
psychology, public administration and political science, sociology

**AFFILIATION**  
Research Assistant Professor at Hong Kong Polytechnic University

**KEYWORDS**  
public participation, social policy and politics, youth and emerging adults, Hong Kong

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2, 2025–2026



# Hayal Akarsu

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**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
anthropology

**AFFILIATION**  
Assistant Professor  
of Cultural  
Anthropology at  
Utrecht University

**KEYWORDS**  
police, reform,  
security

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2,  
2025 - 2026

## Force Experts: Afterlives of police reforms in Turkey

In *Force Experts*, Hayal Akarsu examines why police violence persists globally despite major investments in community policing, democratic training, and non-lethal technologies. Based on 18 months of Wenner-Gren Foundation fieldwork (2015-2017), the book-project shows how reform agendas offer regimes new means to extend power, manufacture legal impunity, and garner legitimacy. Focusing on the Turkish police, Akarsu demonstrates how officers adopt transnational standards to redefine violence as technical expertise—emerging as “force experts”. Rather than operating outside security systems, reform itself becomes a security technology that reshapes everyday experiences of policing. Akarsu’s research follows police trainees, tracks reform networks in Ankara, London, and Belfast, and accompanies officers in the field. *Force Experts* draws on the anthropology of expertise and technological governance, offering a timely contribution to studies of violence, security, and populist authoritarianism.



# Hilde Bras

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## Reproductive Legacies: Missionary medicine and demographic change in Southeast Africa, 1890–present

As the global population is projected to rise from 8.2 to 10.2 billion by the end of this century, largely due to growth in sub-Saharan Africa, historians and demographers are re-examining the region's colonial and postcolonial demographic roots. Hilde Bras's project examines reproductive health and gender dynamics in Southeast Africa from 1890 to the present. Concentrating on four communities with Catholic mission hospitals, it investigates the long-term demographic effects of missionary medicine and cultural interventions in women's lives. Using diaries, reports, parish registers, and patient records, Bras analyses how biomedical practices and family models introduced by missionaries interacted with local norms to reshape social roles, healthcare access, and reproductive outcomes. Tracing these legacies through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the project offers fresh insights into the historical roots of health disparities and demographic change in Africa.



**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
demography, gender  
studies, history,  
medicine

**AFFILIATION**  
Professor of  
Economic and Social  
History at University  
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**KEYWORDS**  
reproductive health,  
gender dynamics,  
demographic change,  
missionary medicine,  
colonialism,  
postcolonial Africa

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2,  
2025 - 2026

# Tita Chico

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**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Professor of English at the University of Maryland

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2, 2025-2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
history of science, literature, technology

**KEYWORDS**  
literature, technology, science, enlightenment, instruments, eighteenth century, Britain, Europe



Tita Chico explores the intertwined history of technology and literature at the heart of what we now recognise as the modern “device”. In the long eighteenth century (c. 1660-1800), the term “device” referred to both a “design” and a “project”, reflecting the close relationship between Enlightenment-era technological innovation and imaginative literary practice. Chico’s research draws on diverse sources—microscopes, encyclopaedias, anatomical studies, mathematical texts, early language machines, thermometers, and landscape poetry—to show how eighteenth-century devices reshaped intellectual and literary production. In doing so, they generated new “truths” about the world, shaping emerging notions of identity, community, and agency. In uncovering how such devices structured knowledge and authority, Chico offers critical insights into how today’s technologies—algorithms, digital platforms, and AI—continue to shape our understanding of truth, human agency, and collective life.

## Devices of Enlightenment: a Literary history of technology

# Arjen De Wit

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**TYPE**  
Instituut Gak Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Assistant Professor, VU Amsterdam

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2, 2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
sociology

**KEYWORDS**  
social productivity, well-being, unpaid work, value of work, meaningful work

The Instituut Gak Fellowship offers researchers the opportunity to work on topics in the field of social security and labor market policy with the aim of producing new scientific knowledge or working on solutions to practical issues. This fellowship is a collaboration between Institute Gak and NIAS. Instituut Gak is committed to contributing to the quality of social security and the labor market in the Netherlands by investing in social projects, research, chairs and professorships.



## Social Productivity: Towards a labour market of doing good

In many Western societies, there is a strong norm that all working-age individuals should engage in paid labour, defined by financial reward and measurable economic output. Arjen de Wit’s project challenges this by exploring social productivity as an alternative. While economic productivity remains essential for funding welfare and public services, its dominance has serious social and environmental costs. Social productivity includes all activities—paid or unpaid—that contribute to the common good. Valuing this broader concept would recognise unpaid, meaningful work and promote paid work that benefits society. It is also more inclusive, as most people can contribute through volunteering, informal care, or employment. If doing good improves well-being, a labour market focused on social productivity could benefit both individuals and society. During his fellowship, de Wit will write a book exploring the concept, its relevance, and potential applications.

# Jolien Francken

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## Measurement Matters: Developing a philosophical measurement toolbox for neuroscience

How our brains function, how our memory and consciousness work—these questions lie at the center of Jolien Francken's research. Jolien Francken's project addresses the complexities of measurement in neuroscience, a field that studies brain mechanisms behind cognitive abilities such as memory and consciousness. Concepts like consciousness are difficult to measure due to diverse methods used across human and animal studies, often resulting in conflicting results. Francken aims to clarify what measurement truly means in neuroscience and develop a philosophical 'measurement toolbox' to improve how measurements are approached and applied. This adaptable toolbox could benefit not only neuroscience but also other life sciences and empirical research. Her work seeks to enhance scientific practices by increasing the clarity and reliability of measurements, while also improving public understanding of science and its role in society. Ultimately, the project bridges gaps between research and public perception, fostering a more coherent view of measurement across disciplines.



**TYPE**  
L'Oréal-UNESCO For  
Women in Science  
Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Assistant Professor  
in Philosophy of  
Neuroscience at  
the Swammerdam  
Institute for Life  
Sciences, University  
of Amsterdam

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2,  
2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
neuroscience,  
philosophy of science

**KEYWORDS**  
neuroscience,  
measurement



The Dutch L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Fellowship program promotes the scientific career of talented young women in Life Sciences with the aim of increasing the number of female professors in the Netherlands. The fellowship is a national initiative within the international For Women in Science program, sponsored by L'Oréal and UNESCO and supported by NEMO Science Museum and the National Network of Women Professors (LNVH).

# Cecilia Hendrikx

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## As It Appears

What is the relationship between architecture and the institutions it serves? Cecilia Hendrikx's research investigates this relationship focusing on the NIAS community. Using a series of *surtout de tables*, she explores how architectural design both reflects and shapes social, historical, and organisational dynamics. By engaging with fellows, staff, and facilitators, she examines how the built environment influences institutional roles within changing societal expectations.

Her work uncovers how the moral values of the time when these spaces were created are visually expressed and how evolving cultural attitudes affect how we perceive these environments today. Hendrikx's methodology combines practical, theoretical, and phenomenological approaches, each informing the other throughout the research process, to reveal the complex meanings behind the spaces we inhabit.

**TYPE**  
Artist in Residence

**AFFILIATION**  
Visual artist

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2,  
2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
anthropology,  
architecture, Art

**KEYWORDS**  
architecture, salon,  
*surtout de table*,  
phenomena



The Artist in Residence is co-funded by the Akademie van Kunsten – KNAW to strengthen the relationship between art and science. This Academy of Arts is committed to represent the voice of the arts in Dutch society – including politics – and to promote interaction between the arts themselves, art and society, and between science and art.





# Femke Roosma

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## What's Next for the Dutch Welfare State? Unpacking Public Support for Social Policy Alternatives



**TYPE**  
Instituut Gak Fellow

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2,  
2025 – 2026

**AFFILIATION**  
Associate Professor  
Tilburg University  
and Professor by  
special appointment  
University of  
Amsterdam

**DISCIPLINE**  
public administration  
and political science

**KEYWORDS**  
welfare states,  
welfare attitudes,  
social policy,  
deservingness,  
solidarity

The Instituut Gak Fellowship offers researchers the opportunity to work on topics in the field of social security and labor market policy with the aim of producing new scientific knowledge or working on solutions to practical issues. This fellowship is a collaboration between Institute Gak and NIAS. Instituut Gak is committed to contributing to the quality of social security and the labor market in the Netherlands by investing in social projects, research, chairs and professorships.



The Dutch welfare state is at a turning point. Shaped by outside pressures, internal challenges, and fresh ideas, it's being pushed toward reform to better meet new social needs. But what should this transformation look like? And what kind of welfare state do people actually support? Femke Roosma's project starts with a key question: how socially legitimate are different policy alternatives? It explores public support for a wide range of social policy proposals—looking at what types of policies people prefer, which groups they think should benefit, and how these policies should be put into practice. The research also examines whether people favour new ideas over existing ones, and which social, political, or economic groups back different approaches. Using a mix of existing survey data and a new survey experiment carried out in December 2023, the project analyses these preferences across society.

# Philip Schleifer

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## Business and the Nature Crisis: Analysing corporate discourse with large language models



**TYPE**  
NIAS Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
public administration  
and political science

**AFFILIATION**  
Associate Professor  
at the Department  
of Political Science,  
University of  
Amsterdam

**KEYWORDS**  
biodiversity, nature,  
business, large  
language models

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2,  
2025–2026

How do major companies respond to the global biodiversity crisis? Philip Schleifer's project uses large language models (LLMs) to examine this significant question. Since the 1970s, wildlife populations have declined by nearly 70 percent, with multinational corporations in agrifood, mining, and construction sectors having substantial impacts. The project creates a new dataset and employs LLMs to analyse how influential firms frame their environmental policies, assessing whether they consider ecological, economic, socio-cultural, and intrinsic values in their biodiversity strategies. By using LLMs as "research assistants," Schleifer explores a powerful new method for analysing large text volumes, which is transforming social science research. The project also addresses emerging challenges in research design—such as prompt formulation and result reliability—as well as ethical issues like bias and transparency, and legal concerns regarding privacy and data use.

Iris Walraven's research aims to improve lung cancer patients' decision-making through more accessible artificial intelligence (AI) treatment recommendations. She focuses on making AI-driven advice understandable, especially for patients with low health literacy. Walraven bridges the gap between advanced medical technology and patient needs by involving patients in creating simple, relatable explanations that clarify complex medical information. Her approach ensures patients can better grasp their treatment options and feel confident in making informed decisions. By emphasising a human-centred design, she hopes to empower patients to navigate their care with clarity. Ultimately, Walraven seeks to develop a system where AI enhances, rather than overwhelms, the decision-making process, improving both understanding and the overall patient experience in lung cancer treatment.

# Iris Walraven

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## Lung Cancer Patients with Low Health Literacy. Explainable Generative AI for shaRed Decision-making: the CLEAR-study



**TYPE**  
L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Fellow

**AFFILIATION**  
Associate Professor cancer epidemiology, Radboudumc

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2, 2025 – 2026

**DISCIPLINE**  
epidemiology

**KEYWORDS**  
AI, lung cancer treatment, patient-centered communication, health literacy



The Dutch L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Fellowship program promotes the scientific career of talented young women in Life Sciences with the aim of increasing the number of female professors in the Netherlands. The fellowship is a national initiative within the international For Women in Science program, sponsored by L'Oréal and UNESCO and supported by NEMO Science Museum and the National Network of Women Professors (LNVH).

In 2018, the UK's Inspectorate of Constabulary warned that parts of the mental health system were failing, leaving police to handle the fallout. By 2023, London's Metropolitan Police announced they would no longer respond to mental health-related calls unless there was an immediate risk. The Dutch police face similar issues. Since the 2015 introduction of the problematic term 'verwarde personen' (confused people), police contact with people in mental distress has increased.

Rebecca Wynter's research, Engaging with Lived Experience, explores how this situation developed and what could change. Focusing on the Netherlands—especially Amsterdam—it addresses a key gap: the absence of lived experience from both sides.

Through oral history interviews with police officers and service users/survivors, Wynter aims to reshape our understanding of how mental disorder is policed and contribute to evidence-based policy, practice, and long-term research.



**TYPE**  
Golestan Fellow

**DISCIPLINE**  
history of mental health

**AFFILIATION**  
Researcher at the Amsterdam School of Historical Studies, University of Amsterdam

**KEYWORDS**  
policing, mental health, London, Amsterdam, social care

**SEMESTER**  
Semester 2, 2025 – 2026

## Policing Mental Disorder in London and Amsterdam since 1945: Engaging with lived experience

# Rebecca Wynter

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The Golestan Fellowships are funded by a legacy from the late Prof. Dr. Med. Kenower Weimar Bash, a Swiss psychiatrist and NIAS fellow from the 1973-1974 academic year and support researchers in the medical or biological sciences who have already made significant contributions to their fields. They should have a specialisation that benefits from daily interactions with scholars engaged in advanced research in the humanities and social sciences.







# Shaping Conversations: NIAS in the media

Years ago, NIAS explicitly placed academic freedom at the very heart of its institutional values—a commitment that has only grown more relevant. The story is told by the Institute's 2024/2025 media performance, in turn reflecting a twofold communication strategy: NIAS aims to disseminate research insights of its fellows as well as food for thought and discussion on academic freedom.

On the following pages we invite you to explore a curated selection of media highlights from the past academic year, featuring fellows Sharon Rose, Frank Dobbin, Wijnand IJsselsteijn, Yuliia Kurnyshova, Oleksandra Moskalenko, Mita Choudhury, Amal Helles, Philip Gorski and Michèle Lamont. Writer, scholar, and former politician Michael Ignatieff, who was President and Rector of the Central European University in Budapest when it was forced out of Victor Orbán's Hungary, is also referenced in the quotes. His keynote address at last year's NIAS opening of the academic year and his public comments attracted widespread media attention and sparked a spirited public debate. Together with NIAS spokespersons they all testify to the Institute's role in public discourse and its leadership in national and international academic landscapes.

In September 2024, the first Safe Haven Fellows from Gaza arrived at NIAS. They had applied in the 2024 'extended call' by which the Safe Haven Fellowship Programme expressly invited scholars in any way affected by the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The Programme had been set up in 2022 in response to the war in Ukraine, and opened up to all scholars fleeing from war and conflict in early 2024, as in Spring 2025, also US-based scholars began to reach out to explore eligibility.

The 2024/2025 media year also covered some consequences of the Institute's position of abstinence from direct institutional ties with Israeli institutions—that we had publicised in early June 2024 as the first academic party in the Netherlands and among the first globally. By this public statement, NIAS had sought to denounce the *scholasticide* in Gaza and wanted to carefully look after its fellows' community, recognising the need to ensure academic freedom and feelings of safety for all.

As we look ahead to the academic year 2025/2026, our focus remains clear: to provide our fellows with exemplary academic freedoms—from the pressures of publishing and teaching to those of politics and war—and to explore the challenges to academic freedom worldwide, while recognising how these shape not only the lives of scholars, but also the viability and resilience of democratic societies and the rule of law.

### NIAS keynote speaker Michael Ignatieff: “Academic freedom is not a privilege reserved for a pampered, complaining elite.”

“The right is engaged in a systematic political assault on universities as free institutions. The Republicans went scalp-hunting—and they got three. A chill is now running through the American academic world, because the message is: none of you are safe. If that’s not a threat to academic freedom, then I don’t know what is. If Trump wins—or if the Republicans retain their majority in the House of Representatives—we can expect more of these hearings.”

- NRC, 30 August 2024

### Journalists from Gaza get a fellowship in the Netherlands

Two journalists from the Gaza Strip will be given temporary accommodation in the Netherlands. They will work for about five months at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) in Amsterdam.

- ANP, 1 September 2024

### Journalist and NIAS Fellow Amal Helles, in her Freedom Lecture

“I was granted the incredible opportunity of a Safe Haven Fellowship at NIAS. This fellowship, which provided me with the time, space and resources to focus on my work, has been a crucial turning point in my life. At NIAS I was able to continue my research and writing in a safe and supportive environment. The fellowship has allowed me to engage deeply with my project reflecting on the role of female journalists in Gaza and the challenges they face. It has been a place where I can think, write and connect with others.”

- De Balie, 17 December 2024

### Dutch universities offer sanctuary to frightened researchers and endangered data from US

For example, the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in Amsterdam (NIAS) has been hosting researchers and artists from conflict and war zones since 2022, initially intended for Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. But already in March 2024, the institute decided to open this Safe Haven Fellowship Programme more widely, to scholars whose work is ‘restricted or opposed by states or non-state entities’. Applications from the US are not yet in, but prospective candidates from the US have already been asking whether they’re eligible. “Who would have thought,” NIAS director Jan Willem Duyvendak explains. “The country that was known as ho-hum of academic freedom. It is actually too terrible for words.”

- NRC, 19 March 2025

### NIAS Fellow Philip Gorski, Frederick and Laura Goff Professor of Sociology at Yale University

“As often happens, intellectuals have confused their own worldview with the wider culture. The aim of my book is to tell a very different story about the history of the West. It is of course true that traditional religion (i.e. organised Christianity) has lost influence, even in the United States. But it has not been replaced by scientific rationalism or philosophical materialism, but by various forms of sacredness - everything from DIY spirituality to yoga studios to celebrity worship to hypernationalism. This reading of culture also leads to another diagnosis of our politics.” (...)

“My favourite hour of the day at NIAS is the lunch hour. Each day, at 12:30 sharp, the fellows make their way down to the lunchroom and sit down together for food and conversation. Not since I was a university undergraduate have I had such interesting and enriching discussions with smart people who study things I know little about. Could I have similarly wide-ranging conversations at Yale? In principle, yes. In practice, no. When I’m at Yale, I mostly speak with colleagues whose interests and expertise are fairly close to my own.”

- De Nederlandse Boekengids, 2025/4

### Israeli university threatens steps against Dutch institute that does not want to cooperate because of war in Gaza

A prominent Israeli university is threatening legal action if the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) does not reverse its decision to renounce cooperation with Israeli institutions in protest against the destruction of Palestinian universities and academic life in Gaza.

The rector of Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Tamir Sheafer, reveals this in a reaction to the institute's move. According to him, it amounts to ‘discrimination’ in violation of European law. Sheafer called that “unacceptable”.

Besides the Hebrew University, the second oldest in the country, the Israeli Association of Universities has also lodged a complaint with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, of which NIAS is part.

Director Jan Willem Duyvendak of the NIAS, based in Amsterdam, speaks of “intimidation”. “We want an open discussion about academic responsibilities. What we are getting now are threats of legal action.” He rejects the accusation of discrimination: “All individual academics always remain welcome with us, including this year we are again hosting a resident fellow from Israel. What we oppose are institutional links in countries with regimes that violate academic freedom. That applies not only to Israel, but also to Russia, China, Iran or Sudan.”

- NRC, 14 January 2025

### Trump is undermining science. Dutch researchers are also affected

Mita Choudhury, professor of modern European history:

“It’s a good thing you’re not here right now,” Mita Choudhury’s American colleagues all told her. Choudhury is professor of modern European history at Vassar College, focusing on gender, politics and religion. Her colleagues are deeply concerned, she says from Amsterdam, where she has been working at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) since February. “Both personally, about the funding of their research, but even more about academic freedom in general. They call the developments disturbing and frightening. Especially because of the speed at which that freedom is being eroded.” Choudhury is currently working on a book about sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But whether she will be able to find an American publisher for her book is unclear. “Words like ‘gender’ and ‘trauma’ are banned from grant applications. I don’t know what pressure publishers are under to reject works with those words in them.”

- Trouw, 21 maart 2025

### “Where is mama?” Female journalists in Gaza

Safe Haven Fellow Amal Helles: “It offered me more than just an office; it gave me breathing space, the chance to write, and the strength to keep going. I began my research on Palestinian female journalists, determined to keep alive the voices of women who continued to speak out, even under fire. From the Netherlands, I continue to represent Gaza wherever I can. I participated in debates and gatherings and gave guest lectures at the University of Amsterdam on the challenges journalism faces in a war situation.”

- De Groene Amsterdammer, 30 April 2025

### Harvard sociology professor Michèle Lamont: “I have experienced what inequality means”

Lamont has been researching social classes and how inequality and exclusion arise in a culture for 40 years. In her latest book, *Seeing Others - How to Redefine Worth in a Divided World*, she argues that decades of neoliberalism have led to rising inequality and to a society that values material and professional success above all else, resulting in the marginalisation of groups who do not have this success, and who are increasingly unlikely to achieve it. (...)

“I want to provide people with the tools they can use to change stereotypical narratives surrounding groups that are excluded.”

- FD, 25 January 2025

### Wijnand IJsselsteijn, professor of Cognition and Affect in Human-Technology Interaction at Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e) and Distinguished NIAS Lorentz Fellow in 2024-2025

“We need everyone to help fuel and shape our collective imagination around AI. Ultimately, it’s about our future epistemic sovereignty: who gets to set the rules of truth? Let’s make sure this isn’t a conversation reserved for the happy few.”

- De Nederlandse Boekengids, February 2025

### NIAS keynote speaker Michael Ignatieff: “Universities should not dictate what is right or wrong.”

*Why is academic freedom such an essential concept to you?*

“We sometimes act as though this freedom is a privilege enjoyed by a small group of spoiled and elitist scholars. But then we forget that the university is one of the oldest self-governing institutions of democracy—those two belong together. Democracy implies the existence of universities that have the autonomy and freedom to determine their own curriculum and research agenda. That’s what enables them to criticize the government that funds them. It makes them sometimes controversial, but also vitally important in a healthy society. Cleveringa understood that. When he protested in 1940 against the dismissal of a Jewish colleague by the Nazis, it was not only to defend the free university. He was protesting an attack on the very foundation of Dutch democracy.” (...)

*How did this period shape your views on academic freedom?*

“The worst part was discovering that there were no formal safeguards in European law. When the European Commission took the case to the Court of Justice, the court could not find a single statute that explicitly protects academic freedom. Europe lacks a binding agreement that obliges member states to safeguard the freedom of faculty, or the autonomy of institutions.”

*What does that mean for similar situations in the future?*

“My message to the Dutch public is this: there are no guarantees. If, God forbid, there were ever an attack in the Netherlands on the autonomy and independence of institutions and academics, Brussels would not be able to offer effective protection. European solidarity would be an empty shell.”

*In your view, what exactly should be protected?*

“In my eyes, academic freedom consists of two dimensions. First, the freedom of any member of the academic community—faculty, staff, and students—to think, write, publish, and teach as they see fit. That is not the same as freedom of speech. This right depends on respect for academic norms and adherence to the rules of scholarship. Second, there is the freedom of academic institutions to define their research goals, their curriculum, and their academic standards. But this right also comes with a condition: they must account for their actions to the government and the taxpayer.”

- Trouw, 3 September 2024



### **“If companies follow Trump too closely, they will be less competitive in the long run. They will lose key talent”**

It is convenient for Frank Dobbin (1956) to get away from home, the United States, for a while. With everything going on, the American Harvard sociologist likes to have a bit of ‘distance’. “I have spent much of my life researching how organisations can increase their diversity,” he says. “And if it’s up to Donald Trump, a lot of them are going to stop doing just that.”

On sabbatical for a year, Dobbin spent the past six months as a fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) in Amsterdam. There, he conducted research on the effectiveness of diversity policies at universities. The evening before he leaves for his next destination, Hong Kong, he and the other fellows have a party to celebrate the end of their stay. They are gathered around a piano and sing a self-rewritten version of the song “We Are the World” (‘we are at NIAS...’)

- NRC, 30 January 2025

### **Fleeing Ukrainian scientists on their country's future: 'Values suddenly don't count'**

Yuliia Kurnyshova fled with her son on the first day of the Russian invasion, in February 2022. She crossed the border into Poland and has not been back. “The bombing had started, it was pure survival,” she says. She wants to go back as soon as she can. “My future is there, in Ukraine.” Colleague Oleksandra (“Sasha”) Moskalenko left together with her daughter shortly before the war, after deliberations with the family. Her husband stayed behind.

Both scholars are currently staying at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in Amsterdam (NIAS). Political scientist Kurnyshova (1980) in the Safe Haven Programme for researchers from conflict and war zones, co-funded by the University of Amsterdam and Maastricht University. She studies moral-legal aspects of war and peace processes. As a Duisenberg Fellow, political economist Moskalenko (1983) researches EU financial responses and their effects on the Ukrainian economy.

- NRC, 11 maart 2025

### **The Psyche of the Autocrat**

Arnon Grunberg: “Is there still a battle that can be won?”

Philip Gorski: “I think so, at the moment I have to be honest I am more optimistic about the future of the liberal democracy in Europe in part because it’s becoming so clear what the alternative is. Once again, and I think this is leading some people to move away from the sort of extremes and more towards to the centre. But it is also true that some sort of hope is necessary to sustaining liberal democracy even if that hope is partly rooted in the memory of what the alternative is.”

- Filosofisch Kwintet, HUMAN NPO 1, 13 July 2025

### **Frank Dobbin, Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences at Harvard University:**

“It has just been a fantastic, very generative few months. The scholars are extremely interesting, from all different places, very intellectually engaged. We have a very dynamic seminar and very interesting engaging lunch talks. It’s academic heaven. Over the course of my career, I’ve had quite a few sabbaticals and I’ve been at a number of institutes for advanced study. In different places, sometimes in Europe, more of them in the US. Yes, and this group is just the most diverse. There are a number of people from the global south, which is unusual. It’s been great to be out of the United States and in the context where I can talk to people from lots of different countries about the project I’m now working on, which is “Diversity programmes in universities that are designed to diversify the faculty.”

- NIAS podcast Room to explore, 2024

### **NIAS keynote speaker Michael Ignatieff: “Academic freedom is under fire from both the right and the left”**

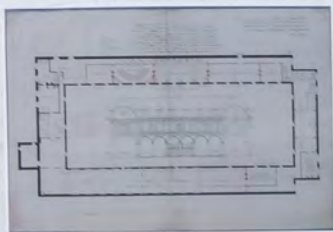
“And as for political pressure: we must continue to resist it and remind those in power that we have the longer breath. That’s what I learned in the struggle against Viktor Orbán. He tried to push us out using laws, but we are still here. Politicians who try to mess with us do so at their own peril, because we’ll still be standing long after these rulers are gone. And we will record how they tried to muzzle us.”

- de Volkskrant, 1 September 2025

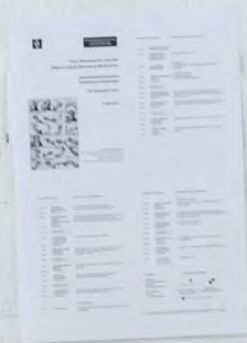
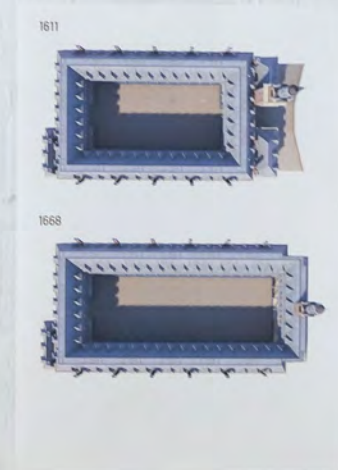
### **How Trump affects Dutch science. NIAS director Jan Willem Duyvendak**

“All pillars of our democratic society must be autonomous and stand on their own. Just as politics must stand on its own, science must stand on its own, as well as the judiciary and the free press. If politics starts acting as the boss over these other pillars, it comes at the direct expense of democracy. It’s telling when radical right-wing politicians dismiss judges by claiming they merely represent an opinion—or dismiss science in the same way: as just an opinion. That kind of rhetoric politicises everything and disregards the distinct ways in which scientists arrive at knowledge and judges at their rulings. When that happens, politics becomes all-important—and that is dangerous.”

- The Night of, NPO Radio1, 12 March 2025



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# The ideological scriptwriters of Donald Trump's film are a motley anti-liberal bunch

— NRC 8 May 2025.

Philip Gorski (1963) is professor of sociology and religious studies at Yale University. His best-known books are *The Disciplinary Revolution* (2003) on the role of Calvinism in European state formation in the early modern era, including in the Netherlands, and *The Flag and the Cross* (2023) on Christian ethno-nationalism in the US. Gorski studied at Harvard and Berkeley. He currently resides in the Netherlands, as a full year fellow of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study. He is working on a critical book about theories of secularisation and the 'desacralisation' that is said to result from it.



Author Sjoerd de Jong  
8 May 2025

He had to take a deep breath when I asked him what he thought of America's vice-president JD Vance during a lunch meeting at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS) in Amsterdam.

"A terrible man! Driven by pure ambition."

But Philip Gorski is first and foremost a scholar. He has studied the rise of Christian nationalism in the United States, a key factor in Trump's—and Vance's—success.

Together with sociologist of religion Samuel Perry, he published *The Flag and the Cross* three years ago, a historical and sociological study of the 'white Christian nationalism' in the US that played a major role in Trump's first election in 2016. This form of nationalism, steeped in racism, anti-liberalism and nostalgia for an imagined past, wages spiritual warfare against a "hollow" secular society.

Christian nationalism seeks political power to radically reform state and society. Gorski and Perry warned that it threatens democracy but draw hope from the spread of powers. Trump may want to be a dictator, but he is unlikely to succeed, was their conclusion.

How does he look at it now? A week after lunch, Gorski and I sat down in his office at NIAS to talk about how he assesses the situation in the US now, three years after his book and the first 100 days of Trump II.

*What did you get right in the book, and what did you miss?*

"When it first came out, I was often accused of alarmism and pessimism. Now I think: we weren't pessimistic enough. What Trump is doing doesn't surprise me, but the speed at which it is happening is shocking. I am also surprised by how quickly all kinds of institutions have given in. In our book we still thought: America is not Hungary. But just look at how law firms, universities and companies are now falling in line."

*Isn't Harvard's resistance encouraging?*

"Yes, but even that university is already under pressure to give in. It's not just about federal money — US elite universities are hugely dependent on rich donors. The Presidents of these universities are constantly trying to raise money. That makes universities vulnerable. Some donors are close to Trump and threatening to stop their donations, including at Harvard."

*So you weren't pessimistic enough then. But aren't you too pessimistic now? He's falling in the polls.*

"Trump is such an erratic and chaotic figure that you can't predict what will happen. Some mornings I wake up convinced the US is heading for full-blown authoritarianism. Other mornings, I think there's still room for resistance. A lot will depend on what happens in the next six months."







*Is Trumpism an ideology?*

"Not in the way that Marxism or liberalism is, with a set of core principles and a theory of society and history. Rather, it's more of a cult of personality that works like an ideological magnet. The coalition of groups that has formed around Trump is quite disparate — but they share a few core traits: a will to power and a shared enemy. They despise the liberal, democratic establishment and want to overthrow it."

*Let's go through them. But first: is there any historical precedent?*

"Definitely. The idea that this is something entirely new in the US is just wrong. After the Civil War (1861-1865), a tyrannical one-party regime rooted in racial terrorism dominated the South. You could speak of a 'southernification' of US politics. There are numerous similarities. The South had the Big Lie that the Civil War was not about slavery but about states' rights. Trump has the lie of the "stolen" election of 2020. He's building on the myth of the Lost Cause, the noble struggle that was unjustly lost and must be fought again. In a broader sense, you could say that the political cultures of North and South America are converging. Our idea was always: yes, over there they have strong men and dictatorships, but we're democratic. That no longer holds."

*Now those factions in the MAGA coalition, Make America Great Again. Which ones do you identify?*

"I've studied white Christian nationalism most closely, though even that's not a unified movement. The best-known group by far are the evangelicals, who believe in personal surrender to Jesus and a Christian society, with anti-abortion as a central issue. They emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, but they are no longer as dominant. In that well-known photo of religious leaders praying with Trump in the White House, you don't see evangelicals, but leaders from the Pentecostal movement — independent churches often formed around a charismatic preacher."

*Catholics also play a role.*

"Yes, that is the third subgroup. The ultra-conservative Catholics who question the separation of church and state and often romanticize Franco's Spain or Salazar's Portugal. They appeal to traditional Catholic theology and metaphysics and have more intellectual firepower than the other groups. That is why they appeal to elites like JD Vance — or political scientist Patrick Deneen, who wrote *Why Liberalism Failed* in 2018. Meanwhile Deneen advocates regime change."

*That's already quite a motley crew. And the fourth current?*

"The least known are the so-called Christian "reconstructionists", a persuasion with roots in the 19th century. They want to update Calvin's Institutes (1536) and dream of a theocracy as they believe he established in Geneva at the time. A society organised according to biblical laws, especially those of the Old Testament. One leader of their movement is the theologian Douglas Wilson, who also writes Christian fiction, a popular genre in the US. They are 'post-millennialists': they believe Jesus will only return after the Kingdom of God has been established on Earth, not the other way around. First Satan must be defeated."

*And Christians are just one part of the MAGA coalition?*

"Alongside them, at least four other groups can be identified. First, the "broligarchs" — tech magnates like billionaires Peter Thiel, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk. We've all seen how important Musk is to Trump, positioning himself as the man to clean out the civil service. Then you've got the anti-feminists of the "manosphere" with idols like Joe Rogan, Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson, who promote masculine self-esteem to young men who feel threatened by feminism, with martial arts and so on. Another group is the "nativists" who push for restoration of the white majority and believe Americans should have more children. There is a group that calls itself "quiverfull". That quiver must be filled with 12, 16 or 18 "arrows" (i.e.) children. Finally, there are the hardcore white supremacists and their militias groups like the Proud Boys. Of course, these groups often overlap."

*The turn in Silicon Valley — once hip and liberal — has surprised many. Self-interest?*

"Money is an important factor. But there's also a futuristic worldview behind it — driven by technology, an apocalyptic spirituality, and science fiction. This is no coincidence. From the 1960s onward, Northern California, home of Silicon Valley, was the center of the new age and human potential movement, alternative cultures seeking to fully develop human capabilities. Many tech pioneers came from that world. Conspiracy theories, back then mostly left-wing, were part of it, as was distrust of institutions. That whole movement shifted to the right. COVID played a major role. Yoga moms began to worry about vaccines, ended up in QAnon or similar circles and are now part of MAGA."

*So how many Americans are we talking about, all in all?*

"Roughly 30 to 40 percent — the "always Trumpers". It's not a majority but they're far better organized and more motivated than the rest."

*Thanks for the worrisome tableau. Now for a few headlines around Trump, how should we place them? JD Vance?*

"A key figure because he is a bridge between the different elements of the MAGA coalition. He fits right into the conservative-Catholic segment since his conversion, but he also has ties to the tech sector, where Peter Thiel has taken him under his wing. He is friends with Curtis Yarvin, a right-wing revolutionary who dreams of an American king leading the country as a CEO. And he is credible to less-educated Americans because of his humble origins in the Appalachians. The man is very intelligent, but also malevolent and deeply hypocritical. That is what makes him so agile. A true opportunist."

*Musk stepped down as DOGE's big cleaner. What was his role?*

"He is the archetypal broligarch. But also a believer in creative chaos. Musk has said he wants to build "legions" of children before the Apocalypse breaks out. With him and other tech billionaires, you see a bizarre mix of Christian End

Times thinking and science fiction, which they grew up with. The idea is that the earth is heading for a diabolical world government that we need to disrupt at all costs. Otherwise, there is nothing left but to flee the planet and relaunch humanity elsewhere. That is the post-humanism of these people, which has boomed due to AI and the internet."

*That seems unlike Trump. Doesn't he have more in common with someone like the reactionary Steve Bannon, who opposes Musk?*

"Bannon is a Traditionalist, belonging to a distinct category altogether. These are deeply reactionary anti-modernists who believe there was once a Golden Age with a mystical unity of religion and politics. That has been lost, but to that tradition, which is much older than Christianity, we must return. That too has a sixties side: they draw on Hindu philosophy and the idea of a cosmic cycle that goes from light to dark and back again. We would now be in the kali-yuga, the darkest period, preceding a new cycle. First we have to go through total destruction before something new can be born."

*How does Trump fit into his own movement?*

"I can ponder about him for a long time. Look, you don't become president in America because you have such an elaborate ideology but because you come at the right time. Twenty years ago, Trump would not have stood a chance, now a good portion of society was ripe for him. Psychologically, he is a narcissistic sociopath, hence those incessant lies and his complete shamelessness. The latter appeals to people. He is a salesman, telling people what they want to hear, and at his rallies a comedian trying out material. In short, he is a performer, which he is now as president. Initially, he wanted to be a film director. That didn't work out, so he has turned his whole life into a movie of sorts. And now we are all in his movie."







# Support Independent Research at NIAS

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You can also leave a legacy gift or build a long-term partnership. We would love to discuss options with you. Please contact Marlous Willemsen at [marlous.willemsen@nias.knaw.nl](mailto:marlous.willemsen@nias.knaw.nl).

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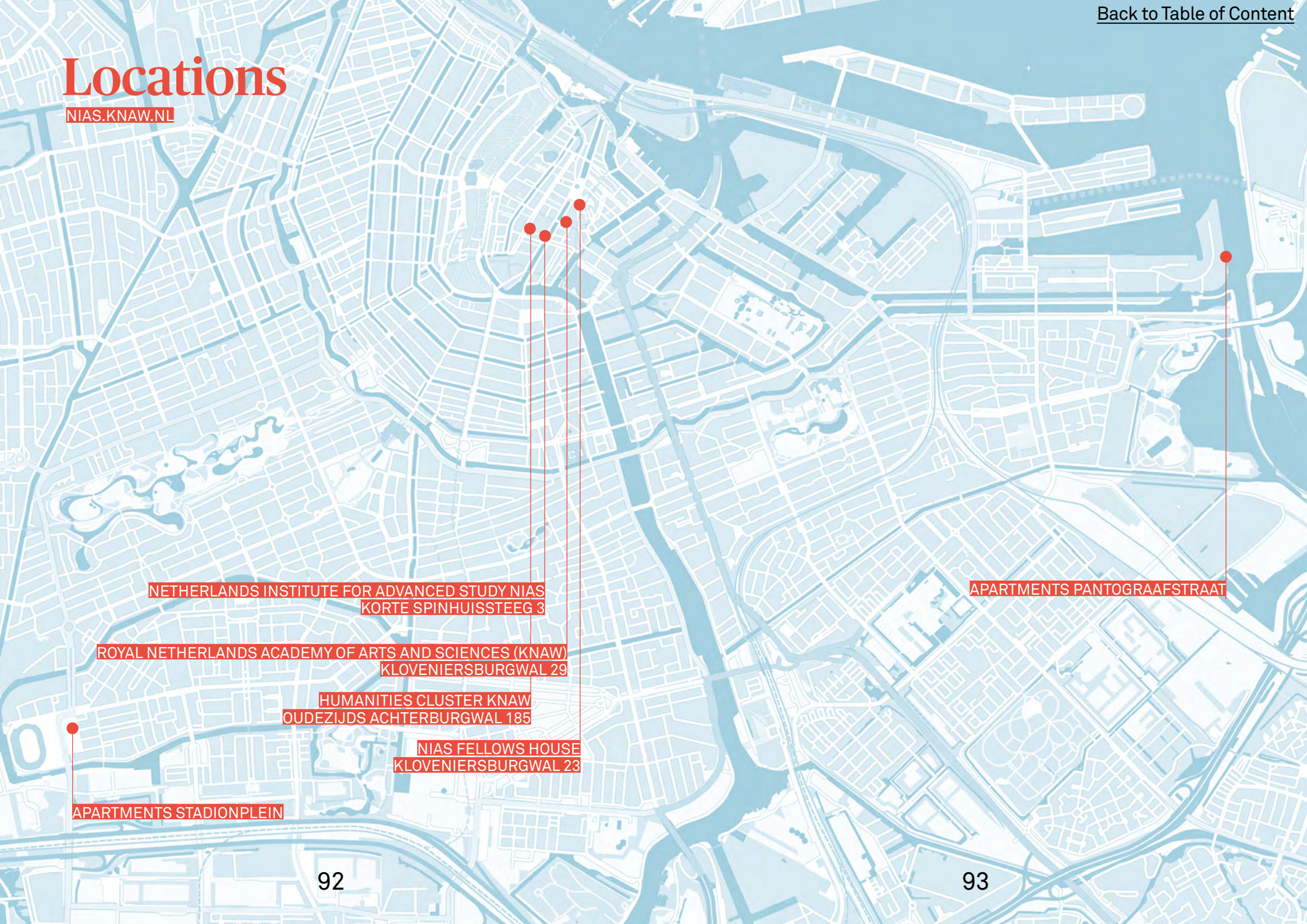






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# Room to explore

Discover the podcast of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS). Listen in and learn about the research that quietly reshapes how we think about the world.

## Episode 1

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, recorded in January 2024, brings anthropologist Ayşenur Korkmaz and media and communication scholar Jessica Feldman into conversation on how current conflicts blur the lines between identity and politics. The NIAS Fellows call for clarity in naming and addressing both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, especially in a charged European climate.

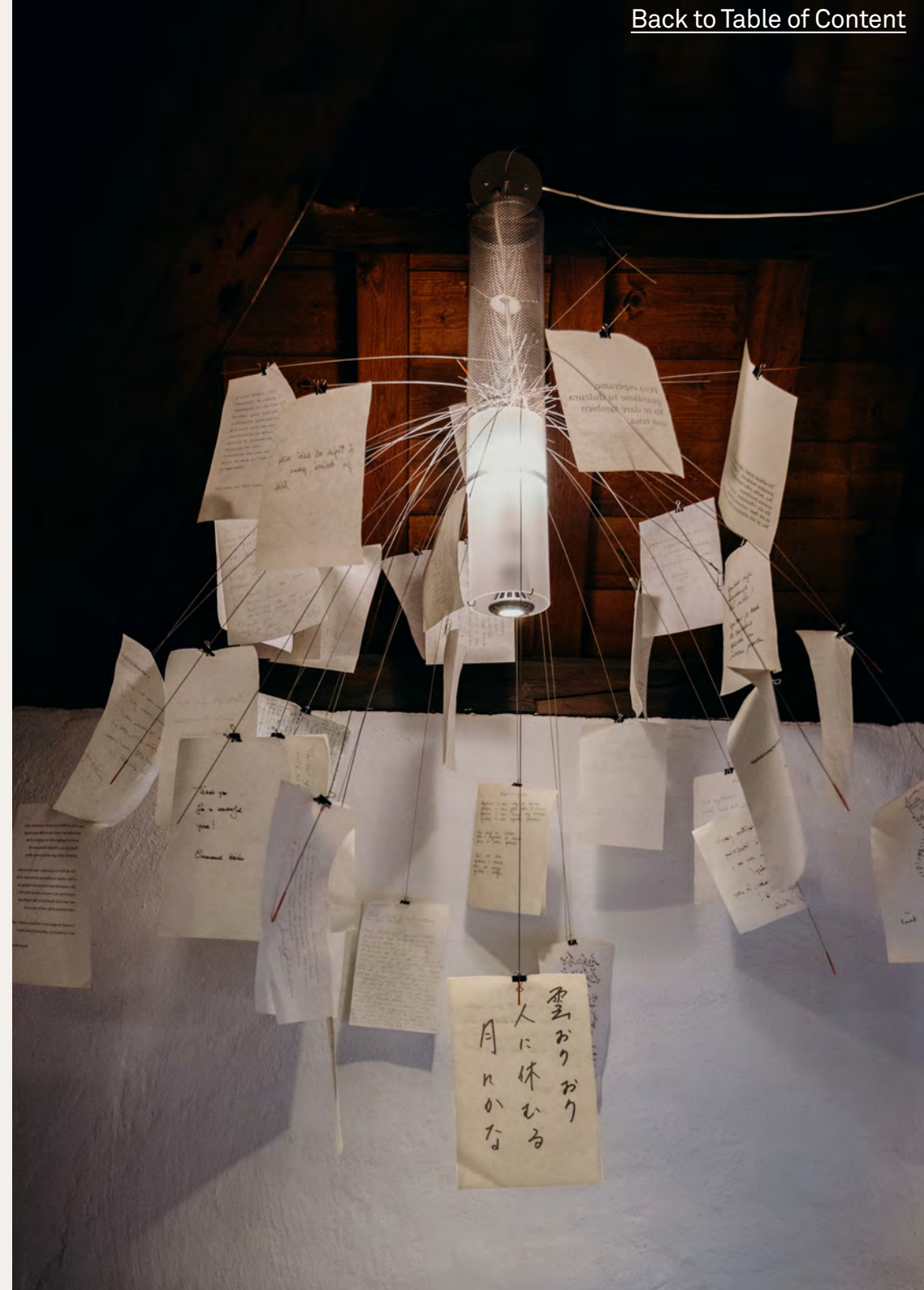
## Episode 2

In Security Labour members of the NIAS Theme Group Re-imagining Security Labour explore how security work shapes everyday life, often invisibly. Through the voices of those within the industry, writer Ed Schwarzschild, anthropologists Tessa Diphoorn and Erela Grassiani, and sociologist Winifred Poster examine how security logics extend far beyond their expected domains.

## Episode 3

Why Many Diversity Programs Backfire, features Harvard sociologist and NIAS Fellow Frank Dobbin. Drawing on extensive U.S. data, Dobbin reveals that many widely adopted diversity measures, such as training and grievance systems, fail to improve faculty representation and can even do harm. In contrast, practices like targeted hiring, structured mentoring, and work-life policies show consistent, positive impact.

Hosted by Annick van Rinsum, *Room to explore* invites reflection through quiet, rigorous thought—offering depth over noise.









# We thank our partners

We are deeply grateful to Maastricht University and the University of Amsterdam for their continued support and partnership in the Safe Haven Fellowship Programme. This collaboration enables NIAS to host a total of six Safe Haven Fellows during the current academic year. Thank to this support the call for applications in our Safe Haven Fellowship Programme remains open year-round, ensuring greater accessibility for scholars at risk.



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# Fellows 2025/ 2026

The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS) offers fellowships to both esteemed and emerging scholars, granting them the time and space to reflect, innovate, and engage in profound intellectual exchange. This fellows booklet introduces the research group for the 2025-2026 academic year.



NIAS serves as a sanctuary for international researchers, writers, journalists, and artists. Free from everyday responsibilities, fellows immerse themselves in curiosity-driven research, exploring new avenues and delving into fundamental questions. They advance their research, collaborate across disciplines, and contribute their insights to broader society.

As the Netherlands' premier and independent institute for advanced study, NIAS was founded in 1970 in Wassenaar and is now situated in Amsterdam's academic heart. It was the first of its kind in continental Europe and the third globally, following Princeton and Stanford in the US. NIAS is part of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.



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AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN

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# Fellows 2025/ 2026



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