

Fellows 2026/ 2027



NIAS

Netherlands Institute
for Advanced Study
in the Humanities
and Social Sciences



Fellows 2026/2027

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Antoine Buyse is Director of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) in Amsterdam. He is also Professor of Human Rights from a Multidisciplinary Perspective at Utrecht University's Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM), which he directed from 2014 to 2026.

His research focuses on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), civil society and human rights defenders, shrinking civic space, and the rule of law from below. He is the founder and editor of the ECHR Blog.

Alongside his academic work, Buyse is a member of the Human Rights Committee of the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) and serves on the board of the Praemium Erasmianum Foundation.

Welcome to NIAS

A hub of serendipity. That would be an apt way to describe NIAS, the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences. At NIAS, we bring together renowned and promising scholars, artists, and journalists from all over the world to form a community of research where unexpected insights and new questions arise. At the heart of our offer is the rare gift of time: time to freely explore both individually and collectively. At our historic premises in Amsterdam, we provide the space for our fellows to withdraw from the daily grind of their professional routines and obligations.

During my first year at NIAS, I have come to appreciate even more deeply that time is conditional for thought, but that it is encounters that set thought in motion – whether in our seminars and workshops or over our time-honoured daily fellows' lunches. The best ideas are not generated in a vacuum, but by bouncing off one another, by thinking out loud, by listening to others, and by asking questions to each other. This way not only curiosity but also insights can multiply.

I have become acutely aware that institutes for advanced study – as they provide both room for focus and stimulate engagement with a richly diverse collective – are rare gems in today's academia. At a time when academic freedom is under mounting pressure around the globe – from financial constraints and publication pressures to political attacks on knowledge, the people who produce it and the places where they do it – their importance must be asserted and defended time and again.

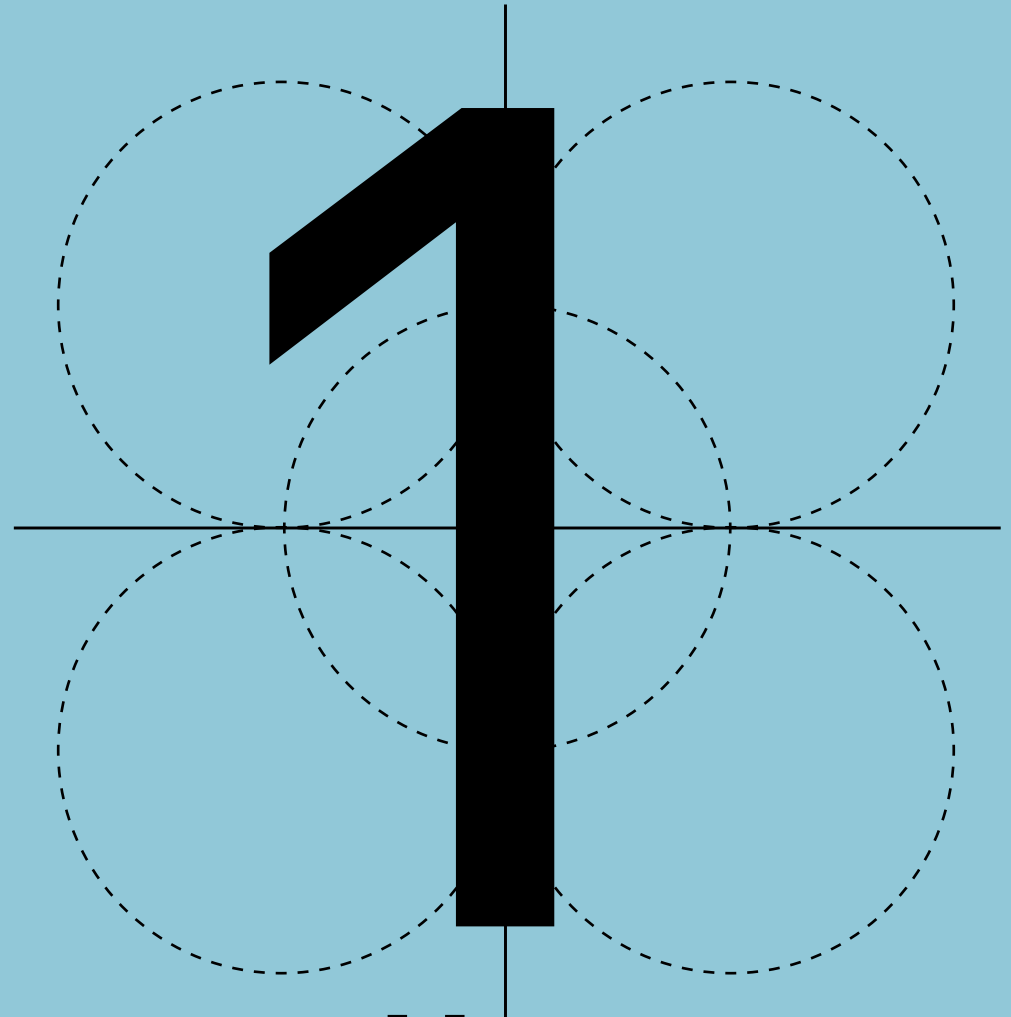
In my own discipline, human rights, the famous dictum holds that such rights are indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated. The same is true of academic, journalistic and artistic freedoms. Each

matters in its own right, and each is essential to the vitality of democratic societies. Each enables – indeed encourages – the pursuit of curiosity and knowledge and truth. Each allows us to scrutinise abuses of power, to challenge established structures and to imagine alternatives. But each also reinforces and sustains the others. It is with this in mind, along with our motto of being Committed to Academic Freedom, that NIAS has set up its new Theme Group on Academic Freedom in Context (see page 9). And it is why we commit to our Safe Haven programme for scholars, writers, journalists and artists at risk.

On behalf of the entire NIAS team, I extend a warm welcome to our new fellows – and an open invitation to all those, near and far, who have already partnered up or have yet to discover NIAS: come closer, join the conversations, and become part of our hub of serendipity.

Antoine Buyse
NIAS Director

semester



Fellows

Kimberly Wehle
Sari Hanafi
Vicky Kosta
Tamar de Waal* (Profile on page 70)

*Second Semester
Fellow

Geertje Mak
Helmer Helmers
Silvia Sebastiani
Ana Eclair

Mehrdad Alipour
Eric Boot
Sarah De Mul
Raquel Irene Drovetta
Catarina Dutilh Novaes
Jisu Kim
Christian Long
Meta van der Linden
Ruth Rebecca Tietjen
Iuliia Anosova
Franka Hummels
Iuliia Pavlova
Hanna Valynets
Yulianti
Abdullah Awad

Charlotte Fournuef-Niel
Lou-Poko Savadogo

NIAS Theme Group

Semester 1
2026 – 2027

Academic Freedom in Context

Courts, universities, and independent media have long served as pillars of democratic governance; when they are captured, delegitimised, or weakened, the door opens to incremental authoritarian consolidation.

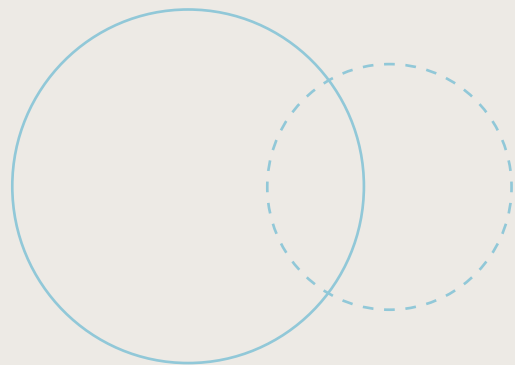
The Theme Group Academic Freedom in Context investigates this global erosion of liberal democracy through the lens of legitimising institutions such as these. It pursues two interconnected goals: to deepen our collective understanding of the factors driving democratic regression and the broader trend of autocratisation, and to develop policy options that can strengthen liberal-democratic resilience against authoritarian takeover. In this first phase, the group synthesises findings from across academic disciplines to identify how flaws within sector-specific institutions interact to create the conditions for autocratic creep — laying the groundwork for a second, multi-year iteration of the project.

About the members

The group brings together **Kimberly Wehle** (coordinator), **Sari Hanafi**, **Tamar de Waal**, and **Vicky Kosta**, combining expertise from law, sociology, legal philosophy, and EU public law.

Democratic erosion is a phenomenon that cuts across legal, social, and political domains, and understanding it requires perspectives that no single discipline can provide alone. Wehle, a legal scholar, examines the conditions under which legitimising institutions – particularly the judiciary, academia, and independent media – fail to uphold democratic norms and thereby facilitate authoritarian consolidation. Hanafi, a sociologist, explores how symbolic (illiberal) liberalism has narrowed the space for genuine public dialogue, including within academia, and argues for a more dialogical approach to rebuilding a shared common good. De Waal, working at the intersection of law and political philosophy, investigates the institutional dynamics of autocratisation and the civic responsibilities of professional groups in defending constitutional resilience. Kosta brings expertise in EU public law, examining how European legal frameworks can both enable and constrain the commercialisation and political co-optation of key institutions.

Together, the group offers a uniquely wide-ranging and practically oriented perspective on one of the most urgent challenges facing contemporary democracies.



Kimberly Wehle

Kimberly Wehle's project examines the circumstances under which historically legitimising institutions - particularly the judiciary, academia, and independent media - have failed to uphold democratic norms, thereby facilitating the rise of illiberal and authoritarian actors. She also investigates institutional reforms that could bolster resilience against autocratisation, taking into account the transformative impact of artificial intelligence and the distinctive challenges of the twenty-first century. In both the United States and Europe, liberal institutions have come under pressure from rising populism, social polarisation, declining public trust, and the complex interplay of legal, epistemic, and communicative structures. When these institutions are captured, delegitimised, or weakened, they create openings for incremental authoritarian consolidation. By tracing patterns of interaction among institutions, her research seeks to provide both conceptual insight and practical policy recommendations.

TYPE
NIAS Theme Group
Fellow | Academic
Freedom in Context

AFFILIATION
Professor of Law
at the University of
Baltimore School of
Law

SEMESTER
Full academic year
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Law

KEYWORDS
Constitutional law,
civil procedure,
separation of powers,
U.S. supreme court

Institutional Vulnerabilities and Democratic Resilience in an Age of Rising Autocratization and AI



Sari Hanafi



TYPE
NIAS Theme Group
Fellow | Academic
Freedom in Context

AFFILIATION
Professor of
Sociology at the
American University
of Beirut

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Sociology

KEYWORDS
Political sociology,
sociology of religion,
transitional justice

Toward a Dialogical Liberal Project

At NIAS, Sari Hanafi will explore how symbolic liberalism can evolve into a dialogical form in times of crisis for liberal democracy. In a world shifting rightwards at a rapid pace, he argues that the pathologies of late modernity - authoritarianism, economic precarity, and environmental destruction - are unfolding in a context where reasonable debate is increasingly difficult. By examining flashpoints of contemporary polarisation, his research critiques how symbolic liberalism simultaneously emphasises the universality of rights while narrowing the space for genuine dialogue. Hanafi advocates a dialogical turn: a renewed public sphere in which diverse conceptions of the 'good' engage in meaningful conversation, thereby strengthening the possibility of achieving a shared common good. During his stay in the Netherlands, he will engage with the NIAS research team investigating academic freedom and societal polarisation, and will carry out fieldwork integrating theoretical insights with empirical observation.

The EU Fundamental Right to ‘Freedom of the Arts and Sciences’: Exploring the Limits on the Commercialisation of Academia

Vicky Kosta

TYPE

NIAS Theme Group
Fellow | Academic
Freedom in Context

SEMESTER

Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE

Law

AFFILIATION

Associate Professor
of European Law at
Leiden University

KEYWORDS

Freedom of the
sciences, academic
freedom, EU law



Universities across Europe are increasingly operating like businesses, adopting market-driven behaviours and being steered towards serving politico-economic interests rather than the pursuit of knowledge. This process of commercialisation may ultimately obstruct science from fulfilling its fundamental function of truth-finding, with far-reaching consequences for society. EU laws and policies on the European Research Area and the European Education Area have the potential to accelerate this trend across member states. Yet they must be measured against the EU’s own constitutional standards, in particular Article 13 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which protects the freedom of the arts and sciences. Vicky Kosta examines what role EU public law plays in relation to this phenomenon. By clarifying the constitutional standard enshrined in Article 13 and examining how EU policy measures up against it, the project sheds new light on one of the most pressing challenges facing European higher education today.

NIAS Theme Group

Semester 1
2026 – 2027

Defamiliarizing Geslacht

The Theme Group Defamiliarizing Geslacht uses this concept as a heuristic device to explore the connections between gender, generation, and intersectionality in new and unexpected ways. At its core, geslacht draws attention to how societies organise the transfer of power, land, property, rights, and identity from generation to generation, and to the central role that the body, sex, gender, and sexuality play in such transfers. The expression van geslacht op geslacht (from generation to generation) captures this double movement: the biological and the social, the bodily and the historical, bound together in a single concept.

The group investigates cases of what it calls ‘troubled transfer’: situations in which the apparent naturalness of continuity between identity, genealogy, and progeny is disrupted, contested, or called into question, often in relation to race and other differences deemed inherited. These cases range widely in time and place. From Protestant households in early modern Europe to

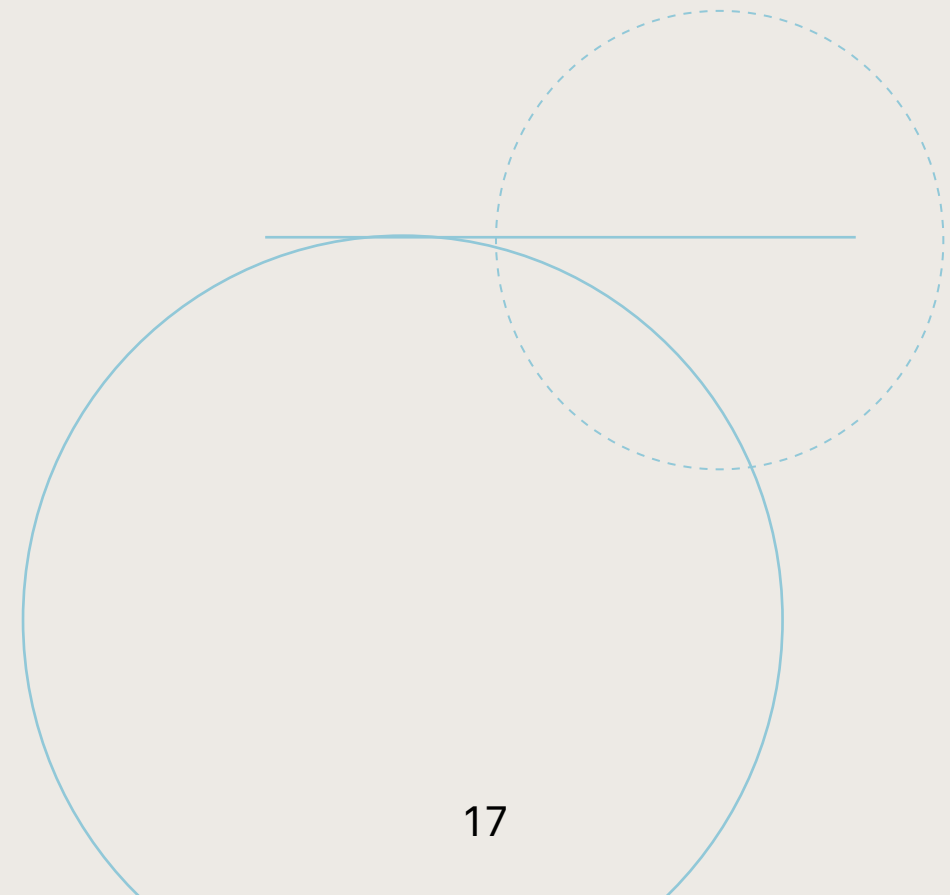
family-constellation therapy in postcolonial Western cultures; from debates among eighteenth-century French naturalists to encounters between European anthropologists and Papuan peoples. By defamiliarising histories, practices, and cultures of genealogy in their connections with gender, sex, sexuality, and race, the project intervenes in a contemporary public debate that has seen an unprecedented surge of interest in tracing roots and lineages — often in ways that uncritically reproduce biological, patriarchal, and dynastic models of identity.

About the members

The group brings together **Geertje Mak** (coordinator), **Ana Eclair**, **Silvia Sebastiani**, and **Helmer Helmers**, combining expertise from gender studies, political history, intellectual history, and cultural history.

Understanding geslacht in its full complexity requires precisely this kind of disciplinary breadth. Gender and sexuality studies, anthropology, and history have each approached questions of kinship, lineage, and identity with different methods and emphases; this group puts them into productive dialogue. Eclair, a gender studies scholar based at the University of Melbourne, examines how family-constellation therapy reimagines relatedness and provides a way into what has been rendered unspeakable. Mak, a political historian of gender at the University of Amsterdam and KNAW, investigates bloodlines in physical anthropological research conducted in Dutch and German New Guinea between 1857 and 1962. Sebastiani, a historian at the EHESS in Paris, explores the relationship between reproduction and the making of humanity in Enlightenment thought. Helmers, a cultural historian at the KNAW Humanities Cluster, investigates how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century genealogies and family books reshaped family and gender relations in the face of political crisis during the Dutch Revolt, and how such realignments related to the rise of familial conceptions of community and nation.

Together, the group brings a rare combination of historical depth and theoretical ambition to one of the most fundamental — and most politically charged — questions in the humanities: how societies decide who belongs to whom, and who gets to say so.



A Race without Geslacht? Blood(lines) in Physical-Anthropological Research in Dutch New Guinea (1920-1962)

Until the 1920s, German and Dutch physical anthropology was built on a deeply racialised division between so-called Naturvölker and Kulturvölker – between peoples deemed to have no history and those who did. Research focused on morphology: differences in skulls and outer appearance, ideally studied in populations considered ‘pure’ and isolated. Under the growing influence of the eugenicist movement in the 1920s and 1930s, however, hereditary notions of race began to displace morphology as the core element of racial measuring. This shift created a fundamental problem: how could race be understood as hereditary without reference to geslacht – genealogy, ancestry, and sexual mixing? Geertje Mak investigates how Dutch physical anthropologists in New Guinea negotiated, in practice, the measuring of bodies and blood, and the genealogical and ancestral notions of the Papuans themselves, in the period between 1920 and 1962.

TYPE NIAS Theme Group Fellow Defamiliarizing Geslacht	DISCIPLINE Anthropology, History
AFFILIATION Professor of Gender History and Senior Researcher at the University of Amsterdam, NL-Lab and KNAW	KEYWORDS Race, genealogy, sexuality, geslacht, physical anthropology, Dutch New Guinea
SEMESTER Semester 1 2026–2027	

Geertje Mak



Family Constellation therapy has become a highly popular experiential therapeutic modality, offering participants a way to explore and reimagine their family relationships and ancestral connections. But what does this practice reveal about contemporary preoccupations with roots, lineage, and belonging – and whose stories does it tell? As part of the Defamiliarizing Geslacht theme group, Ana Eclair examines how Family Constellation therapy simultaneously upholds traditional heteronormative kinship structures and reconfigures complex forms of relatedness. Drawing on the concept of geslacht, which captures the intertwined meanings of sex, gender, sexuality, generation, and lineage, she investigates how historical lineages and forms of biological and non-kin relatedness that have been silenced, deemed non-existent, or rendered unspeakable can be retrieved, reinforced, and reimagined through this therapeutic practice. In doing so, the project sheds new light on the contemporary preoccupation with individual genealogies, roots, and lost ancestral connections.

Ana Eclair

Reimagining Relatedness: Family Constellation Therapy and Immersion into the Unspeakable

TYPE NIAS Theme Group Fellow Defamiliarizing Geslacht	SEMESTER Semester 1 2026–2027
AFFILIATION Associate Professor in Gender Studies at the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne	DISCIPLINE Gender Studies
	KEYWORDS Family constellation therapy, kinship, geslacht, genealogy, relatedness, heteronormativity, gender studies, ancestral belonging



Silvia Sebastiani

Silvia Sebastiani's project investigates how Enlightenment anthropology redefined humanity through the intertwined concepts of civilisation, perfectibility, and reproduction. Emerging in the 1750s, these concepts formed a system that reshaped the boundaries between humans and animals, as well as hierarchies within humanity and between the sexes. At the core of this transformation lies a double movement: the naturalisation of humanity – through its classification within the animal kingdom – and its historicisation – through narratives of progress from savagery to civilisation. Humans were thus both reduced to animals and positioned as their masters. The project argues that the shift from 'generation' to 'reproduction', which redefined species through interbreeding, was central to the temporalisation of humanity and provided new tools for thinking about improvement, heredity, gender, and race. Focusing on the orangutan as a boundary figure between human and animal, the project shows how Enlightenment debates both challenged and reinforced hierarchies, revealing the entanglement of universalism and exclusion in the making of the modern human sciences.

TYPE
NIAS Theme
Group Fellow |
Defamiliarizing
Geschlecht

AFFILIATION
Professor of History
at EHESS, Paris

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
History, History
of Science

KEYWORDS
Civilization,
perfectibility,
reproduction, race,
gender, genealogy,
geschlecht

Reproduction and the Making of Humanity in the Enlightenment



Helmer Helmers



TYPE
NIAS Associate
Theme Group Fellow
| Defamiliarizing
Geschlecht

AFFILIATION
Senior Researcher
at the KNAW
Humanities Cluster

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
History, Literature

KEYWORDS
History, gender,
family books

Defamiliarizing Geschlecht

Helmers' project investigates the making and breaking of kinship in one of the major crises in early modern Europe: the Dutch Revolt. The Revolt was in many ways a crisis of belonging, which ruptured family bonds, both among living kin and with ancestors. The rise of a new genre of self-writing in the period, the family book, reflects the anxieties and pressures produced by this context. The family book was a book created by mostly middle-aged, middle-class men for their children, in which they presented their personal and family histories and genealogies. Helmers' project investigates how war, economic hardship, and forced migration affected their representation of ancestry and kinship. How did they present the relationship between biological and ideological or spiritual kinship? Which relations and family identities did they sever, and which did they seek to transfer to next generations? What kind of future did they seek to make by writing their family history?



Mehrdad Alipour

TYPE
NIAS Fellow

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Gender Studies,
History, Religious
Studies and Theology

KEYWORDS
Intersex body,
islamic/shi'i law,
binary/non-binary
sex and/or gender,
mir 'abd al-fattāḥ al-
marāghī



Non-Binary Intersex and Its Legal Implications in Nineteenth-Century Shi'i Discourse

How did Islamic legal thought conceptualise bodies that did not fit neatly into binary categories of male and female? This question lies at the heart of Mehrdad Alipour's project, which offers a detailed examination of the intersex body within nineteenth-century Shi'i legal thought. The project builds on Alipour's earlier NWO-funded research, which identified a strand within Shi'i jurisprudence that has recognised intersex individuals as a distinct ontological category since the fourteenth century. The present study extends this work through a sustained analysis of the juristic writings of Mīr 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Marāghī (d. 1834), a pivotal figure bridging earlier juristic formulations and later developments in twentieth-century Shi'i legal thought. Alipour examines how intersex individuals were conceptualised within two competing frameworks – one adhering to a binary model of sex, another recognising intersex as a third category – and how these conceptions shaped rulings on inheritance, marriage, ritual, dress, and eligibility for religious and legal office.

Climate Change and Complicit Lawyers

No fossil fuel project could be realised without lawyers. This simple observation raises a profound question: what responsibility do lawyers bear for the climate harms that follow from the projects they help make possible? Eric Boot examines whether lawyers who represent fossil fuel clients are morally complicit in their clients' climate harms – and if so, whether that complicity is blameworthy. Lawyers operate under a specific set of professional obligations that differ from ordinary moral ones, and the project carefully considers how lawyers' professional role bears on the question of their complicity. Where blameworthy complicity is found, Boot asks what lawyers can do about it. He works through a range of options – from counselling fossil fuel clients in a more climate-sensitive manner and lobbying for legal reform, to refusing clients altogether or disclosing confidential information harmful to the corporation – and assesses the justifiability of each.

Eric Boot



TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Assistant Professor
of Legal Philosophy
and Legal Ethics
at the University of
Amsterdam

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Law, Philosophy

KEYWORDS
Legal ethics,
professional ethics,
climate ethics

Sarah De Mul

The Art of Burnout

Burnout is widely discussed yet deeply misunderstood. Many still regard it as a personal weakness or an individual health problem, but this project argues that burnout is better understood as a reflection of modern work culture and its associated social inequalities. Sarah De Mul draws on contemporary art and literature as a lens through which to explore these cultural dimensions of burnout. Weaving personal experience together with the analysis of artistic and literary works, she investigates burnout within the high-pressure work culture of the early twenty-first century. Her approach brings together cultural analysis, gender studies, and the medical humanities to show how creative and artistic expression can illuminate what clinical and sociological frameworks often miss. The project ultimately asks how art and literature can help us understand – and perhaps reshape – our relationship with work and exhaustion today.



TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Professor of Literature, Culture and Diversity at the Open Universiteit

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Cultural Analysis, Gender Studies, Literature, Non-fiction

KEYWORDS
Cultural analysis, critical-creative, burnout, mental health humanities, gender studies

Over the past two decades, feminist organisations across Latin America and the Caribbean have produced self-managed abortion manuals that have been translated into multiple languages and adapted across formats, from print booklets and zines to digital resources, and tailored to different communities, including trans people. These manuals turn clinical information into everyday guides that help protect those who seek abortions from criminalisation, stigma, and barriers within the health system. Raquel Irene Drovetta proposes the concept of ‘feminist care pedagogies’ to describe a collective way of teaching and learning that organises safety, mutual support, and care among those seeking abortion in contexts of unequal access to health services. Combining analysis of physical and digital archives with interviews with the activists who write, edit, illustrate, and distribute these materials, the project shows how the circulation of practical knowledge sustains forms of resistance and reproductive autonomy in the region.

Raquel Irene Drovetta

Feminist Activism and Self-Managed Abortion Manuals in Latin America and the Caribbean



TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Researcher and Associate Professor at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) and Universidad Nacional de Villa María (UNVM), Argentina

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Gender Studies, Sociology

KEYWORDS
Self-managed abortion, feminist knowledge, reproductive justice, abortion activism, feminist care pedagogies, situated knowledge, transnational activism, Latin America, Caribbean, feminist movements

Catarina Dutilh Novaes



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.

Universities and learned societies are increasingly reflecting on their colonial past. Many knowledge practices and institutions that shape post-industrial societies today were forged in the context of European colonial expansion during the modern era. Intellectual movements such as postcolonial and decolonial theory have long examined how these colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary knowledge, yet their insights have had limited impact on the day-to-day practices of science and have not been fully absorbed by fields that theorise about science. Catarina Dutilh Novaes will develop a novel conceptual framework to address the imprint of colonialism on scientific practices. Drawing on feminist epistemology and philosophy of science, she will examine whether, and if so how, knowledge practices and methods can be reformed from within to counter colonial assumptions and practices, aiming to open up alternative ways of producing scientific knowledge.



Towards a Counter-Colonial Epistemology and Philosophy of Science

TYPE
Distinguished NIAS Lorentz Fellow

AFFILIATION
Full Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Philosophy, VU Amsterdam

SEMESTER
Semester 1 2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Philosophy

KEYWORDS
Social epistemology, argumentation, colonialism

Migrant workers play an increasingly important role in the Dutch labour market, yet their pathways into employment remain uneven. Existing research and policy debates rely largely on administrative statistics and surveys, which reveal little about how migrants actually navigate labour market institutions, interpret requirements, confront barriers, or mobilise informal strategies. Jisu Kim addresses this gap by turning to an unconventional source: large-scale, organically produced narratives from Reddit, where migrants seek advice, share experiences, and exchange practical tips. Using computational text analysis and semantic network modelling, she identifies the key difficulties, support mechanisms, and sense-making processes that shape migrants' labour market experiences, comparing multiple migrant subgroups to capture variation across different situations and backgrounds. The project introduces the Migrant Market Access Score, a multidimensional index capturing migrants' perceived clarity, accessibility, and manageability of labour market navigation.



Jisu Kim

Voices of Migrant Workers: Online Narratives of Labour Market Inclusion and Exclusion in the Netherlands

TYPE
Instituut Gak Fellow

AFFILIATION
Assistant Professor at the Department of Interdisciplinary Social Science, Utrecht University

SEMESTER
Semester 1 2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Sociology

KEYWORDS
International migration, digital traces, integration, big data, computational social science



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.

Christian Long investigates the imaginary geography of American spy fiction in the decades following the Second World War, treating genre literature as a form of public education. Challenging the assumption that mass-audience fiction simplifies the world for its readers, he argues that Cold War spy thrillers in fact expanded their readers' geographical imagination - mapping not just what the secret world looks like, but where it can be found, its hot spots and blank spots alike. By taking seriously the literal worlds that spy thrillers construct - examining which locations appear in their pages, and with what degree of specificity - Long opens up a new way of understanding the geography of American Cold War culture. He explores how the imaginary geographies of different spy series and novelists resemble and differ from each other, and why spy novels imagine the world in the ways they do.

TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Senior Lecturer at
University of Otago

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Fiction, Film

KEYWORDS
Genre, espionage,
American literature,
imaginary geography

American Spy Novels and the Locations of Espionage, 1965–2020

Christian Long



Over the past decade, humanitarian migration to the Netherlands has increased sharply as a result of global conflicts, bringing with it a large and distinct refugee population that faces unique integration challenges. Refugees often experience delayed labour market entry, mental health risks, and limited career preparation - factors that contribute to persistently weaker employment outcomes compared to other migrant groups. Despite the central role of labour market participation in Dutch integration policy, surprisingly little is known about how specific policy designs actually shape these outcomes. Meta van der Linden examines how different integration approaches, particularly 'work-first' versus 'train-first' strategies, affect refugees' labour market participation, and investigates for which refugee groups each approach is most effective. Barriers such as language proficiency, time spent in reception centres, and the strength of social networks produce unequal outcomes across the refugee population, and the project takes these differences seriously. Drawing on interdisciplinary theory and combining administrative and survey data, it analyses both short- and long-term employment outcomes, including job stability and earnings, with the aim of producing evidence that can directly inform more effective and equitable integration policy.

Meta van der Linden

Policies That Work? Evaluating Dutch Integration Policies for Refugees' Labour Market Participation

TYPE
Instituut Gak Fellow

AFFILIATION
Assistant Professor
at the Department
of Interdisciplinary
Social Science,
Utrecht University

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Psychology, Sociology

KEYWORDS
Migration, intergroup
contact, intergroup
attitudes, integration,
refugees, policy
evaluation



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.

Ruth Rebecca Tietjen



Affective Radicalisation: A Conceptual Analysis

Radicalisation - the process by which individuals come to adopt extreme political attitudes and behaviours - poses a serious challenge to contemporary democratic societies. Emotions and feelings play a central but underexplored role in this process. The misogynistic incel movement transforms loneliness into hatred of women; radical-right parties channel social discontent into xenophobia; religious extremists turn moderate belief into fanatical devotion. In this project, Ruth Rebecca Tietjen introduces the concept of 'affective Radicalisation' to capture this emotional dimension, complementing existing research on cognitive and behavioural Radicalisation. Drawing on interdisciplinary work in psychology and philosophy, she employs conceptual analysis to develop the first systematic account of affective Radicalisation. By carefully examining the normative assumptions embedded in the concept, she lays the groundwork for a more reflective use of it as a tool of analysis and critique.

TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Tilburg University

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Philosophy

KEYWORDS
(Affective) radicalisation, extremism, philosophy of emotions, affective psychology, hatred, resentment

The Russian war against Ukraine has mobilised a wide range of civic initiatives aimed at accountability for international crimes, from the documentation of violence and support for survivors to legal education and advocacy for criminal justice reform. Yet the transnational cooperation between civil society actors pursuing criminal justice remains surprisingly underexplored, particularly in the European context. Iuliia Anosova examines the processes of legal mobilisation that emerge through cooperation among civil society actors situated in different states. More specifically, she analyses the forms and dynamics of collaboration between Ukrainian NGOs engaging with international and national criminal justice institutions, and national NGOs in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom that possess the initiative, resources, and presence to facilitate and sustain these legal efforts. The project aims to produce concrete recommendations for better tools and strategies to enable more effective engagement of national and grassroots organisations in international legal processes through cross-border cooperation.

Iuliia Anosova

Legal Mobilization through Cooperation: Seeking Accountability for the International Crimes Committed in the Context of Russia's War against Ukraine



TYPE
Safe Haven Fellow

AFFILIATION
Postdoctoral Fellow at the Human Rights Center/Faculty of Law and Criminology of Ghent University

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Law, Sociology

KEYWORDS
Criminal justice, conflict-related sexual violence, war crimes, prosecution, transitional justice



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, Maastricht University and the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) are partners in the Safe Haven Fellowship Programme.

Franka Hummels

TYPE

Fonds BJP Fellow

AFFILIATION

Independent journalist

SEMESTER

Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE

History, Journalism,
Non-fiction, Public
Administration and
Political Science

KEYWORDS

Belarus, oppression,
democracy, diaspora,
political transition,
nation building,
identity

Missing Minsk

Franka Hummels' book brings together the stories of members of the Belarusian democratic opposition to explore how they relate to Belarus. Many of the interviewees left the country following the repression that succeeded the 2020 election protests. The book examines how Belarusians seek to sustain and redefine their national identity beyond their country's borders at a time when both traditional and contemporary Belarusian culture are being systematically suppressed within Belarus itself. It also considers how exiled communities prepare for the possibility of a future democratic transition, the challenges of rebuilding life abroad, and the sense of loss experienced both by those who left and by those who remained in a country transformed since 2020. A second dimension of the book addresses the consequences of the Belarusian regime's restrictions on foreign journalism. Journalists with extensive expertise and experience in Belarus are no longer able to work freely in the country, which affects the depth and quality of information available to Western European audiences. The book reflects on what is lost as a result, while also showing how information continues to be gathered and reported under these conditions.



Fonds BJP 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.



Iuliia Pavlova

Youth Resilience in Ukraine (YRU): Longitudinal Trajectories of Youth Mental Health, Relationships, and Resilience – Evidence for Policy and Practice



How does growing up in a country at war shape the lives of children and young people? In Ukraine, an entire generation is coming of age under conditions of prolonged uncertainty: repeated air alarms, disrupted education, displacement, family separation, and the chronic stress of daily life during wartime. These experiences have profound consequences for mental health, sleep, relationships with parents and peers, and the ability to study, plan, and feel hopeful about the future. Iuliia Pavlova follows young people from different Ukrainian regions over time, combining surveys with information from parents, stress data, and data on air alarms and attacks. The study seeks to understand which young people are most at risk, which factors help them cope and recover, and what communities can do to support them. Its findings will be shared through research publications, policy briefs, and practical recommendations for education and support systems in Ukraine.

TYPE

Safe Haven Fellow

AFFILIATION

Professor at the Ivan Boberskyj Lviv State University of Physical Culture

SEMESTER

Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE

Educational Sciences

KEYWORDS

Wellbeing, population health, rehabilitation needs, mental health and stress biomarkers, physical activity & literacy



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, Maastricht University and the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) are partners in the Safe Haven Fellowship Programme.

Only Stories Left: How Authoritarianism Decreases the Space for Public Discussion and Private Opinions on Social Media

Hanna Valynets



Hanna Valynets' fellowship project explores how people in Belarus cope with increasing pressure and repression in their everyday digital lives. Social media platforms that once served as spaces for everyday communication, self-expression, and public discussion have gradually become more restricted, particularly after 2020. Criminal cases related to comments, likes, emojis, subscriptions, and other online interactions have changed not only political communication, but also ordinary online behaviour. The project examines how people manage visibility and risk under these conditions, and where their everyday experiences move when they are no longer openly expressed online. Many users delete posts, stop updating accounts for years, switch platforms, rely only on temporary content such as stories, hide behind empty profiles or coded names, or leave social media entirely. Through digital ethnography and in-depth interviews, the research observes patterns such as silence, platform switching, coded expression, and deleted content – strategies people use to create distance between themselves and potential danger.

TYPE
Safe Haven Fellow

AFFILIATION
Independent
researcher, NGO lead

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Journalism, Media
Studies, Sociology

KEYWORDS
Media studies,
digital ethnography,
authoritarianism,
self-censorship,
social media,
surveillance



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, Maastricht University and the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) are partners in the Safe Haven Fellowship Programme.

TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Assistant Professor
at the Universitas
Gadjah Mada

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
History, Religious
Studies and Theology

KEYWORDS
Lombok war, Lombok
collection, looted
objects, Indonesia,
ownership, religious
objects, restitution,
decolonial



Locating Religious Objects in the Lombok Collection

Yulianti

In 2023, 485 objects removed during the colonial period were repatriated to Indonesia. Among them were the so-called Lombok Treasures: objects looted following the fall of Cakranegara in Lombok in 1894. The repatriation catalogue lists a range of religious and spiritual objects – amulets, statues of Hindu deities, ceremonial bowls, plates used for ceremonial dishes, holy water containers, amulet necklaces, and palm manuscripts – each identified by number and name, but with no further information. Yulianti sets out to recover those stories. Focusing on the religious objects within the Lombok collection, she investigates questions of ownership, meaning, and historical narrative in order to reconstruct the social history of these objects. Using a decolonial approach, the project deconstructs the narratives imposed by colonial power – narratives that have long silenced and marginalised the social history of these objects – while keeping the history of colonialism itself fully in view.



Abdullah Awad

Classifying Otherwise: Metadata, Epistemology, and the Democratic Mandate of the Library

At a critical moment when knowledge institutions are moving toward AI-assisted systems, Abdullah Awad's project asks how libraries might reflect on the ways access to their collections is already mediated – and how, in turn, their collections might be classified in other ways. The project begins by examining the epistemological assumptions embedded in library classification and metadata practices, and then considers how such practices might be expanded to better preserve the intellectual, literary, and cultural dimensions of diverse objects. Drawing on cases from the KB's collections, the project focuses on premodern manuscripts, multilingual texts, and contemporary literary works produced across multiple cultural inheritances. Its aim is to develop an expanded framework for classification and metadata enrichment that remains interoperable and institutionally usable while strengthening the democratic mandate of the library.

TYPE
KB Fellow

AFFILIATION
Director at the
Institute for Critical
Thought

SEMESTER
Semester 1
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
History, Philosophy

KEYWORDS
Knowledge
organisation; library
studies; intellectual
history; metadata;
critical digital
humanities

KB nationale
bibliotheek

Established in 2026 by NIAS and the KB National Library, the KB Fellowship supports researchers and creative practitioners exploring the future, public role and democratic importance of libraries. Projects may address the KB's digital collections, practical and societal challenges, or the wider library field, preferably from an international or comparative perspective.



Charlotte Fournuef-Niel

Recording the Present: A Curatorial Jump into the Everyday Practice in Performing Arts

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.

INSTITUT
FRANÇAIS NL
NOUVEAU
GRAND TOUR

Charlotte Fournuef-Niel's research project examines contemporary performance through its material, symbolic, and economic conditions. The first strand explores the forms of traces and archives that exist for contemporary performance - including photographs, video recordings, sketches, protocols, and narratives - and investigates how these materials shape narratives, memories, and histories of performance, while also reflecting on their limitations and institutional uses. The second focuses on remuneration and the economic conditions of performance work, approaching fair compensation as not only an economic but also a political, ethical, and symbolic issue, and seeking to better understand the realities of performance labour through exchanges with artists and cultural organisations. The third examines the role of clothing and costumes in the construction of performative identities, considering how clothing can signal function, create fiction, reveal power relations, and reinforce or subvert social and economic norms. These questions will be explored through interviews, meetings, and observation of contemporary performance practices, particularly in the Dutch context.

SUMMER



TYPE

Nouveau Grand Tour
Fellow

AFFILIATION

Artist

SEMESTER

Summer

DISCIPLINE

Art, Theatre and
Performance Studies

KEYWORDS

Performative arts,
economic conditions,
costume, clothing,
identity, traces,
archives

Turn a Blind Eye

As restitutions accelerate across the Netherlands - particularly at the Wereldmuseum Leiden - a quiet but urgent question emerges: what becomes of the museum after the objects have departed? What can be done with emptied display cases, orphaned plinths, and exhibition architectures designed to show what is no longer there? For Lou-Poko Savadogo, absence is not a void but an active condition - one that invites a fundamental rethinking of exhibition formats and how museum spaces are inhabited. During her residency at NIAS, she develops Turn a Blind Eye, a research-creation project focused on this after-restitution moment, in which objects leave the museum but their display structures remain. Through fieldwork in Amsterdam and Leiden, she documents recently reconfigured spaces and develops a series of experimental installations that question the museum as an architecture of the gaze. Bringing together her artisanal practice with critical reflection on museography, she seeks to transform inherited structures into tools of critique and hospitality.

TYPE

Nouveau Grand Tour Fellow

DISCIPLINE

Architecture, Art

AFFILIATION

Independent designer and researcher

KEYWORDS

Restitutions, museography, research-creation, design

SEMESTER

Summer

Lou-Poko Savadogo



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.



Summer stays

Alongside two French Nouveau Grand Tour Fellows, NIAS hosts its regular Summer Stays during the months when our buildings are not occupied by the fellows of the first and second semesters. Summer Stays are not fellowships, but short, work-related stays for NIAS alums, who can rent our apartments and offices to focus on a project and exchange ideas with other alums in residence. This way, NIAS remains an academic beehive even at the height of summer, while making fuller use of its buildings. In the summer of 2026 we had the following alums stay at NIAS:

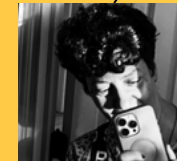
Abosedo George

Works on a book about African diaspora communities and the making of cosmopolitan nineteenth-century Lagos.



Elisa Tamar Albert

Completes final edits on a new novel exploring how war permeates every aspect of life.



Johannes Koll

Develops a research project on resistance to National Socialism within universities in Germany and Austria.



Eric Mijts & Iris Sommer

Develop a framework using computational linguistics and AI to support mental-health care in lower-prestige and less-codified languages such as Papiamentu.



Mark Moritz

Studies how anthropology programmes can better prepare students for careers beyond academia.



Sherill Ann Tippins

Completes *The First Two Hundred*, a book about the diverse inhabitants who shaped seventeenth-century New Amsterdam.



Oleksandra Moskalenko

Studies fiscal and monetary policy coordination and macroeconomic stabilisation in wartime Ukraine.



Jeanine Treffers-Daller

Studies how code-switching, multilingualism and multicultural identity affect creativity.



Marc Andreas Frey

Works on a book chapter about violence and Dutch colonialism.



Emmanuel Berger

Studies French extradition policy and judicial cooperation during the Revolution and Napoleonic Empire.



Evie A. Malaia

Develops a framework for understanding language as a biological information-transfer system shaped by the brain's computational organisation.



full Year Fellows

Stefo Benlisoy
Antoni Tsaputra
Kimberly Wehle* (Profile on page 11)
Michael Funke

*Theme Group Fellow:
Academic Freedom in Context



Stefo Benlisoy

TYPE NIAS Fellow	DISCIPLINE History
AFFILIATION Associate Professor at the Sociology Department of Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ)	KEYWORDS Ottoman Empire, labour history, history of Istanbul, Balkan history, nationalism, history of early socialism, non- Muslim Ottomans, women's history
SEMESTER Full academic year 2026–2027	

The final decades of the Ottoman Empire have long been understood through the lens of competing nationalisms - yet this picture is far from complete. In the ethnically and religiously diverse late Ottoman capital, new social classes were emerging, and with them new forms of political organisation. Workers and members of the professional middle class increasingly turned not only to nationalism but to liberal, socialist, and anarcho-syndicalist ideas. In this project, Stefo Benlisoy rehabilitates the first socialist labour organisation of late Ottoman Istanbul, the Union of International All-Laborers (Panergatiki), restoring it to its rightful place in the history of social and political movements in both late Ottoman and early Republican Turkey. Situating the organisation within regional and global networks of socialist and labour activism, he examines its ideological orientation, its key figures, and its strategies towards the city's poly-ethnic and multi-religious working classes, challenging nation-centric approaches that have long dominated Ottoman labour history.

Workers of Istanbul Unite! A Socialist Workers Organisation in the Late Ottoman Capital 1909-1922

FULL YEAR

Beyond the Gate: What Indonesia Can Learn from the Netherlands' Deinstitutionalisation Journey

In Indonesia, people with psychosocial disabilities are still predominantly cared for within institutional settings. Antoni Tsaputra's project explores how Indonesia might move towards a more inclusive, community-based model of mental health support - one that prioritises independence, recovery, and full participation in society. Drawing on the experience of the Netherlands, a country that has gradually replaced large psychiatric institutions with local services built around patients' rights and autonomy, Tsaputra compares policies, funding systems, and stakeholder roles in both countries. Cultural factors such as family roles, community leadership, and the stigma surrounding mental health are also taken into account. Drawing on document analysis, interviews, and field observations, the project aims to produce a concrete roadmap for reform and to lay the groundwork for a more rights-based system in which people with psychosocial disabilities can live independently and participate fully in society.

Antoni Tsaputra

TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Assistant Professor
at the Universitas
Negeri Padang

SEMESTER
Full academic year
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Development Studies

KEYWORDS
Deinstitutionalisation,
community-based
mental health
care, psychosocial
disabilities, disability
rights, Indonesia,
Netherlands, policy
reform, social
inclusion



At NIAS, Michael Funke will study the economic and political implications of recent geopolitical shocks, including the war in Ukraine and the intensifying US-China trade conflict, which have propelled geopolitical risk to the top of policy agendas worldwide. His research examines how geopolitical developments and risks affect global economies, with core topics including economic dependence and interdependence, the economics of sanctions, globalisation and fragmentation, and the economic aspects of conflict and cooperation. His work also addresses broader political developments accompanying these transformations: the gradual decline in the number of liberal democracies worldwide and the rise of autocratic regimes. The heightened risk of democratic backsliding has not been driven by sudden coups, but by the gradual erosion of liberal democracy from within and from without by pressures posed by China and Russia. A noticeable wave of autocratisation has emerged from this interplay.

Michael Funke



The World Economy's Shifting Winds: Geopolitical Shocks and Challenges

TYPE
Duisenberg Fellow

AFFILIATION
Professor of
Economics at
Hamburg University

SEMESTER
Full academic year
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Economics

KEYWORDS
Macroeconomics,
political economy,
econometrics



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).

semester

2

Fellows

NIAS
Theme Group

Lucia Donatelli
Martha Lewis
Claire Stevenson

Abdeslam Badre
Laura Fair
Nandita Sharma
Margriet Hoogvliet
Nina Holvast
Mohamed Oubenal
Zainab Musa Shallangwa
Moiz Tundawala
David Gómez Gamboa
Alexa Stoicescu
Tamar de Waal

Additional NIAS Fellows

Meet the additional fellows joining us in the second semester of 2026/27

As in previous years, several fellows due to join NIAS in the second semester had not yet been announced when the annual Fellows Booklet went to press. The booklet is therefore never entirely complete. This QR code directs readers to a webpage, where we will introduce these fellows as soon as their appointments have been made public.

They include the Journalist-in-Residence, who has been awarded the Fonds BJP Fellowship, and three Safe Haven Fellows, all of whom will join NIAS in the second semester.

Scan the QR code to see the list of the additional fellows joining NIAS in the second semester 2026-27.



NIAS Theme Group

Semester 2,
2026 – 2027

Abstraction, Broad Generalisation, and Composition: The ABCs of Analogy

How does analogical reasoning – the ability to use relational abstractions to learn about and generalise to novel situations – emerge in humans, and can it be replicated in machines? These are the central questions driving the Theme Group Abstraction, Broad Generalisation, and Composition: the ABCs of Analogy.

Using formal, computational, and large language models as experimental testbeds, the project examines how analogical reasoning is represented, approaching it through the lenses of abstraction,

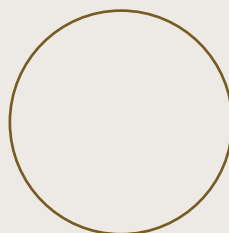
generalisation, and composition. It aims to generate new hypotheses about key developmental stages in analogical reasoning; the relationship between language and analogical reasoning; and how insights from human development and artificial intelligence can inform and complement one another.

About the members

The group brings together **Lucia Donatelli** (coordinator), **Martha Lewis**, and **Claire Stevenson**, combining expertise from linguistics, computer science, and psychology.

Analogical reasoning sits at the intersection of all three disciplines: it involves language, cognition, and computation in ways that no single field can fully account for. Donatelli, a linguist, investigates how analogy and composition underpin the human capacity to recombine familiar concepts into new ones. Lewis, a computer scientist specialising in neurosymbolic AI, examines what representations AI models need in order to reason analogically, and how symbolic theories of reasoning can be realised in neural networks. Stevenson, a psychologist, traces the development of analogical reasoning in children – focusing on the shift from associative thinking to relational reasoning – and asks what this can tell us about how AI acquires, or fails to acquire, the same skill.

Together, the three researchers bring complementary methods and perspectives to a shared problem, creating the conditions for genuinely interdisciplinary insight into one of the most fundamental capacities of human – and artificial – minds.



Lucia Donatelli



Language and Analogical Reasoning

TYPE NIAS-Lorentz Team Group Coordinator ABCs of Analogy	SEMESTER Semester 2 2026–2027
AFFILIATION Assistant Professor of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	DISCIPLINE Linguistics
	KEYWORDS Natural language processing, semantics, syntax

Lucia Donatelli investigates the relationship between analogical reasoning and language, with a particular interest in how analogy and composition underpin compositional generalisation - the capacity to systematically recombine familiar concepts, as encoded in linguistic structure, into novel ones of a differing linguistic form. As the coordinator of the NIAS-Lorentz Theme Group on the ABCs of Analogy, her work seeks to illuminate the mechanisms by which speakers extend and repurpose what they already know to express something entirely new. Her project contributes to a broader interdisciplinary inquiry into how analogical reasoning develops in humans and whether it can be replicated in machines, combining insights from linguistics, cognitive science, and artificial intelligence.



The NIAS-Lorentz Theme Group (NLTG) is an international team of researchers who come together for a five-month period at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) to pursue collaborative, interdisciplinary research. The group conducts cutting-edge work that bridges the divide between the humanities and/or social sciences and the natural and/or technological sciences. Their collaboration often results in concrete outputs such as an edited volume, scientific publication, or a proposal for external funding (e.g. ERC). The NLTG is particularly intended for early to mid-career researchers who wish to explore and establish new interdisciplinary fields of research through close interaction with colleagues from other academic disciplines.

While large language models (LLMs) are undeniably successful, they fail in areas such as compositional generalisation, abstraction, and analogical reasoning – tasks that humans, including children, perform with ease. Humans perform these tasks because they can manipulate and reason with symbols, whereas evidence suggests that LLMs rely largely on shallow pattern matching. Martha Lewis examines how symbolic theories of analogical reasoning can be realised in neural networks. Using methods such as Tensor Product Representations, categorical compositional distributional semantics, and Logic Tensor Networks, she maps from symbolic to neural models. An emerging paradigm – neurosymbolic AI – seeks to incorporate symbolic structure into neural systems, offering interpretable models that are less susceptible to surface-level reasoning while benefiting from graded neural representations learned from data. Each approach makes different commitments regarding concept representation and composition.

Neurosymbolic Models of Analogy



The NIAS-Lorentz Theme Group (NLTG) is an international team of researchers who come together for a five-month period at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) to pursue collaborative, interdisciplinary research. The group conducts cutting-edge work that bridges the divide between the humanities and/or social sciences and the natural and/or technological sciences. Their collaboration often results in concrete outputs such as an edited volume, scientific publication, or a proposal for external funding (e.g. ERC). The NLTG is particularly intended for early to mid-career researchers who wish to explore and establish new interdisciplinary fields of research through close interaction with colleagues from other academic disciplines.

TYPE
NIAS-Lorentz Team
Group Fellow | ABCs
of Analogy

AFFILIATION
Assistant Professor
of Neurosymbolic
AI at the Institute
of Logic, Language,
and Computation,
University of
Amsterdam

SEMESTER
Semester 2
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Computer Science

KEYWORDS
Neurosymbolic
AI, computational
linguistics,
compositional

Martha Lewis



Claire Stevenson



TYPE
NIAS-Lorentz Team
Group Fellow | ABCs
of Analogy

AFFILIATION
Assistant Professor
of Psychology,
University of
Amsterdam

SEMESTER
Semester 2
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Psychology

KEYWORDS
Artificial intelligence,
cognitive
development,
artificial creativity,
cognitive AI methods

Claire Stevenson observes that, while analogical reasoning has been widely studied in human development and is only just beginning to emerge in large language models (LLMs), little is known about how AI acquires this skill. Her research explores the development of analogical reasoning in both children and AI, as illustrated by puzzles such as ‘horse is to stable as chicken is to ...?’ She focuses particularly on the shift from associative thinking – for instance, ‘chicken-egg’ – to relational reasoning, such as understanding ‘lives in.’ Whereas children typically make this transition between the ages of four and eight, AI models tend to exhibit early associative patterns but encounter difficulties with abstraction, generalisation, and compositional thinking. By charting these developmental stages and comparing the trajectories of humans and machines, her study aims to both enhance AI reasoning and clarify whether models truly reason or merely reproduce associations and memorised patterns.

Tracing Analogical Reasoning Development in Children and AI Models



The NIAS-Lorentz Theme Group (NLTG) is an international team of researchers who come together for a five-month period at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) to pursue collaborative, interdisciplinary research. The group conducts cutting-edge work that bridges the divide between the humanities and/or social sciences and the natural and/or technological sciences. Their collaboration often results in concrete outputs such as an edited volume, scientific publication, or a proposal for external funding (e.g. ERC). The NLTG is particularly intended for early to mid-career researchers who wish to explore and establish new interdisciplinary fields of research through close interaction with colleagues from other academic disciplines.



Abdeslam Badre



Positionality, Reflexivity, and Knowledge Production about the Moroccan Diaspora in the Netherlands

Who produces knowledge about migrant communities, and how does their background shape what they find? These questions lie at the heart of Abdeslam Badre's project, which examines how academic knowledge about the Moroccan diaspora in the Netherlands has been produced over the past fifty years. Existing studies have covered a wide range of themes - from labour migration and integration to identity formation and inequality - but far less attention has been paid to how these narratives are constructed, and to what extent researchers critically reflect on their own influence in the process. Drawing on a systematic review of key academic publications and in-depth interviews with Dutch scholars, Badre explores how researchers' social backgrounds, identities, and assumptions shape their research questions, methodologies, and interpretations. The project also examines how academic knowledge on migration feeds into broader public debates and policy discussions, highlighting the risk of reproducing simplified or essentialist representations of Moroccan communities.

TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Associate Professor
at the Mohammed V
University in Rabat

SEMESTER
Semester 2
2026-2027

DISCIPLINE
Cultural Analysis,
Gender Studies,
Migration Studies

KEYWORDS
Positionality,
reflexivity, Dutch
researchers,
Moroccan diaspora,
knowledge
production, migration
research

Laura Fair



Swahili Foodways

Laura Fair's book project takes as its starting point a striking puzzle: the Swahili have nearly two dozen quite distinct breads - sweet and savoury, flat and leavened, baked, grilled, and fried - yet the Swahili grow no wheat, and well into the twentieth century no wheat was grown anywhere in East Africa. How did Swahili women, the region's principal cooks, come to master this foreign ingredient and imbue their creations with such imaginative creativity? How and when did indigenous breads, crafted from millet flour and baked in something akin to a tandoor oven, come to be supplanted by breads of wheat and rice? And what moved bread from an occasional indulgence to a central component of contemporary Swahili diets? These questions set the tone for a broader exploration of how the consumption of fruits, vegetables, animal and non-animal proteins, and a variety of grains, tubers, and musaceae has changed over time. Organised around popular Swahili dishes, the book examines the social, cultural, environmental, and health impacts of Swahili foodways, with a particular focus on dietary change over the past 150 years.

TYPE
NIAS Fellow

DISCIPLINE
History

AFFILIATION
Retired Professor
of African History,
Department of
Middle East, African
and Middle Eastern
Studies at Columbia
University

KEYWORDS
Swahili history, food
history, East Africa,
gender history,
dietary change,
colonialism, African
studies, material
culture

SEMESTER
Semester 2
2026-2027

The Figure of the Foreigner in Colonial, Anti-Colonial, and Postcolonial Thought and Practice

Nandita Sharma



Nandita Sharma will study how the concept of ‘colonialism’ is largely defined by the idea of ‘foreign rule’ and how this affects contemporary politics of ‘decolonisation.’ Our world of nation-states promised to end colonialism by replacing colonisers with national sovereigns, yet discourses of colonialism remain widespread - in ideas of neocolonialism, demands for decolonisation, and anti-migrant politics portraying migrants as colonisers. Sharma asks how the centring of the figure of the Foreign Ruler in understandings of colonialism contributes to this dynamic. She also examines how the emphasis on foreign rule obscures the global terrain of capitalism while legitimising the view that native or national rulers will secure political independence. Expanding the definition of colonialism as practices rather than as foreignness or nationness of rulers may reveal many more instances of colonialism thus far ignored, both historically and today.

TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Professor of Sociology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa

SEMESTER
Semester 2
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Sociology

KEYWORDS
Migration, mobility, nation-state, nationalism, racism, autochthony, indigeneity, commons



TYPE
NIAS Fellow

AFFILIATION
Jansonius Curator at the University of Amsterdam, University Library, Allard Pierson

SEMESTER
Semester 2
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
Gender Studies

KEYWORDS
History of cartography, women map makers, women printers and publishers

Forget the stereotype that women cannot read maps. In early modern Amsterdam, a surprising number of women were professionally involved in making and publishing them. Yet the history of cartography has been slow to recognise this. Margriet Hoogvliet has identified 51 women who were active as mapmakers in Amsterdam between around 1580 and 1800. In this project, she re-evaluates the archival records documenting these women and places her findings within the broader European context of women’s economic and intellectual agency as artisans and printers. She also scrutinises the maps and atlases themselves to assess these women’s professional skills, scientific knowledge, and entrepreneurial spirit. The project sets out to transform the historiography of early modern Dutch cartography - a field that has long, and wrongly, been treated as an exclusively male profession - by restoring these women to their rightful place in the history of science and trade.

Margriet Hoogvliet

Uncovering Early Modern Women Mapmakers in Amsterdam: A Re-Evaluation of Archival Records and Broader Contextualisation

Nina Holvast



TYPE
NIAS Fellow

DISCIPLINE
Law, Sociology

AFFILIATION
Associate Professor
at the Erasmus
School of Law

KEYWORDS
Legal education,
socialisation,
legal profession,
professional identity
formation

SEMESTER
Semester 2
2026–2027

Transformation into a Lawyer: The Legal Profession's Influence in Law School Socialisation

Lawyers occupy prominent positions in society, and legal education plays a crucial role in preparing students for their future professional roles. Traditionally, the legal profession - lawyers and their institutions - has been heavily involved in shaping that preparation, but this involvement has changed significantly over time and is increasingly being called into question. Drawing on empirical data from a longitudinal study, Nina Holvast examines the contemporary role of the legal profession in the socialisation of students in Dutch legal education. She further explores how this evolving relationship shapes students' sense of professional identity - and their understanding of what it means to become a lawyer. The project contributes to a growing body of literature on professional identity formation and the sociology of legal education, with implications for debates about access to justice and the future of the legal profession.

Mohamed Oubenal



TYPE
NIAS Fellow

DISCIPLINE
Criminology,
Sociology

AFFILIATION
Tenured Researcher
in Sociology at
Institut Royal de la
Culture Amazighe
(IRCAM)

KEYWORDS
Amazigh culture,
urban settings,
Amazigh studies,
decolonial, historical
ethnography

SEMESTER
Semester 2
2026–2027

The Transformation of Amazigh Culture in Urban Areas

Amazigh (Berber) culture has long been studied by researchers, yet its specific realities in urban environments have received surprisingly little attention. Mohamed Oubenal bridges this gap by examining how Amazigh culture navigates and transforms within cities and modern institutional frameworks. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in Morocco and among Amazigh communities in Europe, he weaves together deeply personal life stories with a critical analysis of French colonial archives. His approach goes beyond a critique of Western perspectives to also examine how local nationalist movements have created their own cultural hierarchies. Integrating decolonial and subaltern frameworks, the project shows how traditional legacies are not simply preserved in the modern city, but actively reimagined within it - a process shaped by colonial history, contemporary politics, and the lived experiences of urban Amazigh communities.

Our Voices Matter: Exploring Local Perceptions on the Restitution Issue in Benin City, Nigeria

The global momentum for the restitution of looted African cultural heritage has intensified significantly since President Emmanuel Macron's 2017 declaration, reviving long-standing debates around the return of the Benin Bronzes. Nigeria's demands date back to the 1930s, and recent repatriation efforts by Germany, the University of Cambridge, and the Horniman Museum have brought questions of restitution, reparation, and cultural justice back to the fore. Within Benin society, the bronzes carry deep spiritual, political, and identity-forming significance. Yet more than a century after the 1897 looting, shifting religious, cultural, and generational landscapes raise urgent questions about the contemporary meaning and relevance of these objects. Zainab Musa Shallangwa investigates how everyday people in Benin perceive restitution, how the significance of the bronzes has evolved over time, and what reparation might realistically look like. By foregrounding local voices that are too often excluded from elite-dominated restitution discourse, she provides grounded insights into cultural memory, identity, and historical trauma.

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SEMESTER
Semester 2
2026–2027

DISCIPLINE
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Analysis

KEYWORDS
Benin bronzes,
restitution,
reparation, heritage,
memory



Zainab Musa Shallangwa

Moiz Tundawala



Legalizing Sovereignty in South Asian Constitutionalism

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KEYWORDS
Constitutionalism,
sovereignty,
Hindutva,
Islamism, South
Asia, comparative
constitutional
law, authoritarian
populism, political
thought

Across the world, authoritarian and nationalist movements are claiming political power not by suspending constitutions but by working through them, translating their ideologies into the language of constitutionalism itself. Nowhere is this more visible than in contemporary South Asia, where the ethno-nationalist movement of Hindutva in India and the religious movement of Islamism in Pakistan have instrumentalised constitutional democracy to entrench their visions of law and sovereignty, despite having been at odds with the founding principles of both states. Moiz Tundawala investigates this paradox by situating himself at the intersection of constitutional theory, comparative constitutional law, and the history of political thought. He asks why Hindutva and Islamism, both historically averse to liberal constitutionalism, have chosen to work within constitutional frameworks rather than declare a state of exception; how juridical discourses and practices in India and Pakistan have accommodated these anti-constitutionalist forces; and what this reveals about the relationship between law and sovereignty in the current age of authoritarian populism. Drawing on the key texts of Hindu and Muslim constitutional thought alongside constitutional debates, statutory enactments, and judicial decisions, he weaves together South Asian legal thought and juridical practice into a broader framework for understanding the conflict between constitutionalism and sovereignty.

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Literature,
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KEYWORDS
Dutch-language
literature,
posthumanism,
relationality,
decolonisation,
queerness,
ecocriticism,
comparative
literature,
transnational
literature



Alexa Stoicescu

Writing Relationships: Towards a Relational History of Dutch-language Literature from the Avant-Garde to the Present

Contemporary Dutch-language literature is far more diverse than its canonical image suggests, encompassing underrepresented voices and themes including queerness, decolonisation, and ecocriticism. Alexa Stoicescu's book project, *Writing Relationships: Towards a Relational History of Dutch-language Literature from the Avant-Garde to the Present*, sets out to capture this diversity through a new theoretical lens. Drawing on the framework of relationality, the project examines seven themes across the past century, including gender and intersectionality, technology, disability, decolonisation, and conflict. It analyses five novels per theme across distinct historical periods and transnational contexts spanning the Netherlands, Flanders, Suriname, the DR Congo, and Indonesia. This inclusive approach both reinterprets canonical works and revives overlooked voices.

David Gómez Gamboa

Bridging Gaps in International Law on Academic Freedom and State Responsibility: A Latin American Approach



International law remains fragmented and inconsistent in its regulation of academic freedom and state responsibility. David Gómez Gamboa bridges this gap by developing a Latin American approach that draws on the Universal and Inter-American human rights systems, whose legal frameworks, including the Inter-American Principles, provide grounds for enforcement. Through hermeneutical interpretation of both hard and soft law, the project defines academic freedom as an independent, enabling right closely tied to democracy. It examines this right along four axes: its core attributes, protected subjects, and reach beyond the university; its limitations under interdependent standards relating to expression, education, and assembly; its intersection with non-discrimination within safe classrooms; and the classroom as an open forum against indoctrination. Combining comparative documentary analysis with case studies of domestic and international law, and drawing on empirical monitoring data from the Latin American Observatory of NGO Aula Abierta, the project traces the evolution of academic freedom advocacy between 2017 and 2027, examining how civil society supports UN and Inter-American bodies. In addressing the lack of effective international sanctions, it advocates for a stronger hermeneutical approach by international bodies to ensure state accountability.

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DISCIPLINE
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KEYWORDS
Academic freedom,
human rights law,
Inter-American
System, civic space
and universities in
Latin America

Between Vulnerability and Resilience: Institutional Dynamics of Autocratisation

Tamar de Waal investigates the global erosion of liberal democracy and the rise of illiberal and authoritarian leaders, parties, and movements through the lens of historically legitimising institutions, including the judiciary, academia, and the independent media. Her project has two interrelated aims: to contribute to the collective understanding of the factors driving democratic regression and global autocratisation, and to develop practical policy solutions that can strengthen liberal-democratic resilience against authoritarian takeover. In the first phase of the project, she synthesises findings from various academic disciplines to identify and assess how institutional flaws interact to create conditions enabling autocratic creep. She also examines how these dynamics relate to broader conceptions of citizenship and to the civic responsibilities of professional groups in defending constitutional resilience.

Tamar de Waal

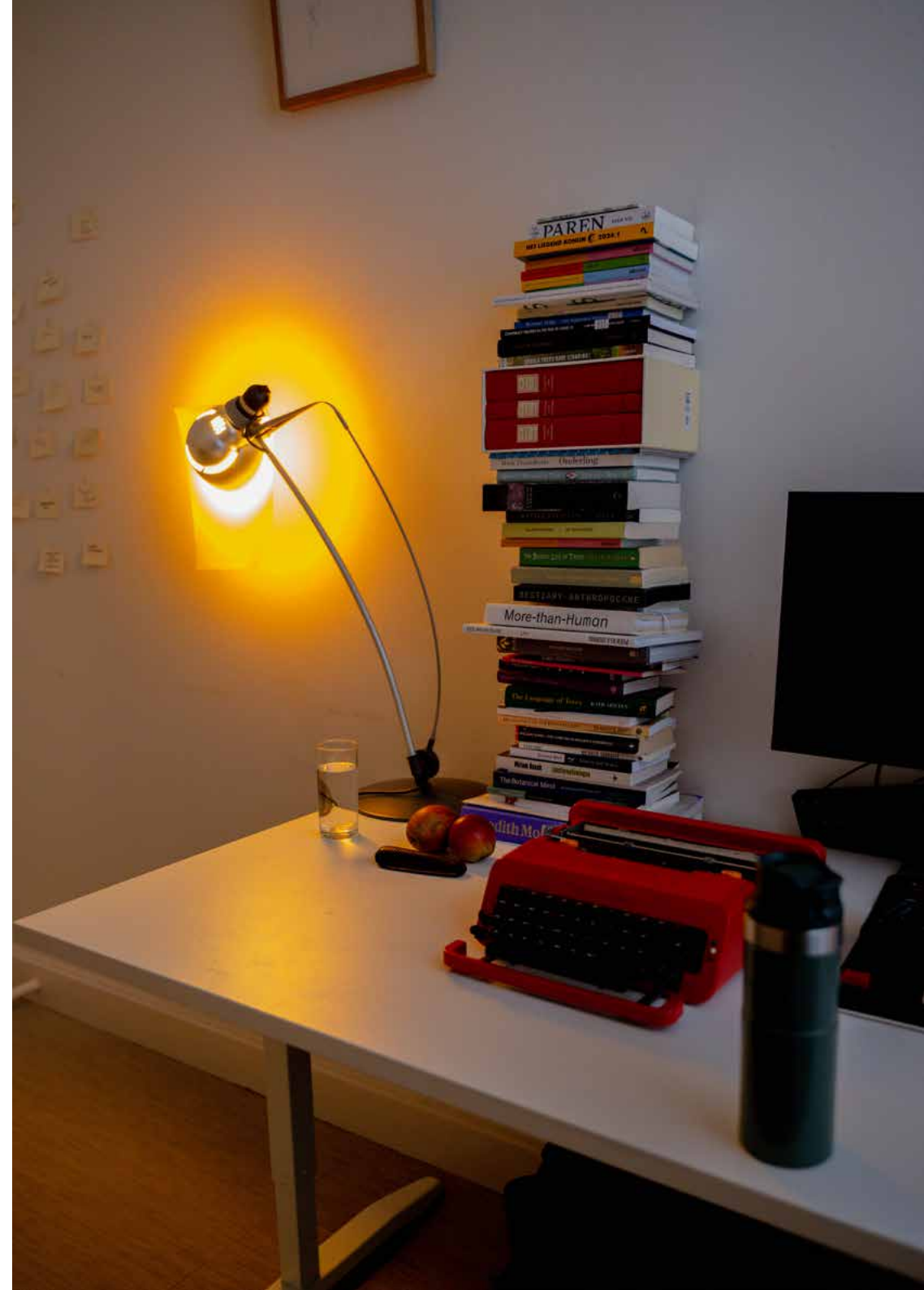
TYPE
NIAS Theme Group
Fellow | Academic
Freedom in Context

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DISCIPLINE
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KEYWORDS
Citizenship, values
of democratic rule of
law, civic education



Viewpoint or Standpoint Diversity?

Why this distinction keeps fuelling the debate about the future of our universities

By Rachida Azough

“Should a university provide a platform for all opinions, even if they run counter to the outcomes of empirical research?” The question was posed by Jan Willem Duyvendak, former director of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS), in an interview with NRC. Together with Leo Lucassen, former director of the International Institute of Social History (IISG), he warned about the growing politicisation of universities under the banner of “academic freedom”.

Duyvendak argued: “It is very worrying that, here too, radical right-wing parties in the House of Representatives keep coming up with the insinuation that the university is too left-wing or too elitist. In doing so, they themselves are politicising science. That is truly threatening. They are now doing it under the banner of ‘academic freedom’, but they fail to make a proper distinction between that and freedom of expression.” Lucassen made a related point: “You never hear politicians talking about ‘right-wing science’. I would think that just as bad an idea; good science is neither ‘left’ nor ‘right’.”

Both scholars thus argued that serious scholarship must remain grounded in evidence, methods and intellectual rigour rather than ideological loyalty. Their exchange touches on a distinction that has become increasingly important in debates about universities: the difference between viewpoint diversity and standpoint diversity. Although the two differ by only a single word, they rest on profoundly different ideas about what diversity is – and, more fundamentally, about how knowledge itself is produced.

The distinction is easier to grasp than the terminology suggests. Viewpoint diversity concerns the range of opinions people hold. It asks whether different political beliefs and ideological positions are represented within an institution. Standpoint diversity asks something different. It concerns the positions from which people encounter, investigate and come to know the world. Gender, race, class, nationality, (dis)ability, professional background, disciplinary training and life experience can all affect what researchers notice, which questions occur to them and which assumptions remain invisible. Put simply: viewpoint diversity asks what people think; standpoint diversity asks how the positions from which knowledge is produced may shape what can be seen, questioned and known.

The confusion between the two is understandable. In everyday language, *viewpoint* and *standpoint* sound almost interchangeable. In Dutch, this is even clearer: *standpunt* usually means someone's opinion. Think, for example, of the radio segment Stand.nl, which invites members of the public to express their opinion on a proposition of the day. Within philosophy, sociology and anthropology, however, *standpoint* has acquired a much more specific meaning. And the distinction has become central to discussions about academic freedom, scientific objectivity and the purpose of the university.

Why viewpoint diversity has become politically salient

Proponents of viewpoint diversity argue that universities lean overwhelmingly towards progressive politics, leaving conservative or heterodox perspectives underrepresented. Political leaders have increasingly portrayed universities as institutions in which certain political opinions are unwelcome. The extent and significance of that imbalance, and the claim that it makes conservative opinions unwelcome, are both contested. What is far less controversial is the broader principle often invoked in support of viewpoint diversity: scholarship benefits from the possibility of challenging established ideas. That principle draws on a long liberal tradition extending back to thinkers such as John Stuart Mill, who argued that claims to truth should be exposed to criticism rather than protected from it. Few academics would disagree with that.

The disagreement begins when ideological balance itself becomes an institutional objective. Universities do not normally appoint scholars because they are

conservatives, liberals or socialists. They appoint them because of their expertise, the questions they ask, the evidence they bring to bear and the methods through which they produce knowledge. Political disagreement may certainly emerge from that process, but representing the political spectrum is not the same thing as producing epistemic diversity.

The controversy is sharpened by the political context in which viewpoint diversity is now invoked. In some of the political debates in which viewpoint diversity has gained prominence, radical-right parties and movements have presented it as the form of diversity universities ought to protect, while attacking initiatives intended to broaden participation across gender, ethnicity, class and other social backgrounds. Teaching and research on colonialism, structural inequality, diversity and equity have similarly become political targets. In this context, viewpoint diversity is not always advanced as one valuable form of pluralism among others. It can become an argument that political opinion is the only diversity that matters, while other forms are dismissed as ideological, discriminatory or politically suspect. That is precisely where the distinction between viewpoint and standpoint becomes consequential.

Where does standpoint theory come from?

During the 1970s and 1980s, feminist philosophers and social theorists began asking a deceptively simple question: What if the production of knowledge itself has a point of departure? Standpoint theory developed through the work of scholars including Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, Dorothy E. Smith and Patricia Hill Collins. Their central insight was that knowledge is never produced from nowhere. Every act of scholarship begins somewhere. No researcher enters an archive, laboratory or field site without a history, a language, a body, an education and a social world. These do not determine what someone will discover, but they can shape what becomes visible, which questions seem worth asking and which assumptions escape scrutiny.

The question, therefore, is not whether knowledge is situated. It is how scholarship becomes aware of its situatedness and subjects it to critical examination. Expanding the range of positions represented within research can consequently expand the range of questions that research is capable of asking.

The question, therefore, is not whether knowledge is situated. It is how scholarship becomes aware of its situatedness and subjects it to critical examination. One way of doing so is by bringing different intellectual and experiential positions into conversation: assumptions that remain invisible from one position may become apparent from another. A greater diversity of standpoints can therefore broaden not only the answers scholarship produces, but also the questions it is able to ask.

What that means at NIAS

At NIAS, diversity is therefore considered in relation to the production of knowledge rather than political affiliation. In composing cohorts of fellows, we look at several dimensions that can broaden the intellectual and experiential positions represented in the group. We aim for gender balance between women and men while being explicitly inclusive of genderqueer fellows; a balance across career stages and levels of research independence, with roughly equal representation of early-, mid- and senior-career scholars; geographical diversity, with roughly equal representation of fellows affiliated with institutions in the Netherlands, the rest of the Global North and the Global South; and disciplinary and methodological diversity, balancing the humanities and social sciences while also including researchers from other fields.

These are not proxies for political opinion, nor do they presume that people belonging to a particular category think alike. The point is not that gender, geography, discipline or career stage determines what someone will think. It is that different positions can shape what scholars encounter, which questions appear salient to them, what bodies of knowledge they draw upon and which assumptions they are more likely to notice or question. Bringing those differences into sustained intellectual exchange can make scholarship more reflexive about its own starting points and broaden the range of questions it is able to ask.

Does standpoint mean that only insiders can understand?

This is perhaps the most persistent misunderstanding of standpoint theory. Critics sometimes interpret it as claiming that only women can study women, only migrants can study migrants or only Indigenous scholars can produce knowledge about Indigenous communities. But that does not follow from the idea that knowledge is situated. A standpoint is not simply an identity, and having a particular experience does not automatically generate scholarly insight.

Experiences matter because they affect what people encounter and what may initially be visible to them. But experience still has to be interpreted, investigated and tested. Experiential knowledge is therefore more than simply having had an experience.

Nor are researchers imprisoned within their own identities. People can learn about lives radically different from their own, listen to the experiences of others and acquire perspectives they did not possess at the outset. Ethnography provides perhaps the clearest demonstration: researchers routinely study communities and forms of life very different from their own. What matters is not a shared identity but methodological rigour, reflexivity, sustained engagement and a willingness to have one's assumptions questioned. Experience may be a starting point for knowledge. It is not its endpoint.

Why critics remain sceptical

Standpoint theory has been enormously influential, but it has never gone uncontested. One long-running debate concerns the claim, present in some versions of standpoint theory, that marginalised social positions can offer particular epistemic advantages. Critics worry that this can slide into granting epistemic authority to particular groups simply because of who they are. Others worry that emphasising social position can slide into essentialism, as though everyone who shares an identity must also share a perspective. Still others fear that an excessive emphasis on positionality could fragment the possibility of shared knowledge or universal standards of evidence.

These criticisms have shaped decades of debate within philosophy and the social sciences. Contemporary standpoint theorists have responded by stressing that individuals occupy multiple, intersecting positions; that there is enormous diversity within social groups; and, crucially, that identity or experience is not itself an argument. Critical reflection on one's position is the beginning of scholarly inquiry, not its conclusion.

Why advocates of standpoint diversity criticise viewpoint diversity

The criticism of viewpoint diversity becomes clearer from this perspective. Universities are not parliaments. Their purpose is not to reproduce society's electoral or ideological distribution inside every faculty. Nor is scholarship improved simply by ensuring that for every political position there is somebody employed to articulate its opposite. What matters is whether the community of researchers collectively possesses enough difference in experience, disciplinary formation, methodology and intellectual tradition to expose assumptions, discover blind spots and ask questions that a more homogeneous group might overlook. This is a form of diversity directly connected to the production of knowledge.

What is really at stake?

Ultimately, the disagreement between viewpoint and standpoint diversity is not a disagreement about whether diversity is desirable. It is a disagreement about what kind of diversity universities require – and why. This brings us back to Duyvendak's question. Academic freedom and freedom of expression are not the same thing. A university should be a place where established knowledge can be questioned, controversial hypotheses can be investigated and prevailing assumptions can be overturned. The strength of scholarship lies in the multiplicity of questions, experiences, methods and intellectual traditions through which claims about the world are subjected to evidence, scrutiny and challenge.

Forgotten Places, Forgotten People

Interview
Leendert van der Valk |
slavery researcher
Illustrations by Richard Kofi

Recent NIAS alum Leendert van der Valk is a freelance investigative journalist who writes for the newspaper NRC and the weekly magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer*, among other publications. He specialises in colonial history, music journalism, and narrative journalism. He has published books on the musical and historical ties between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. His most recent book, *Forgotten Places, Forgotten People*, on which he worked while at NIAS, argues that the Dutch slavery toll was at least five times higher than the figure routinely quoted by officials and in history books. Leendert also teaches journalism at the University of Amsterdam (UvA).

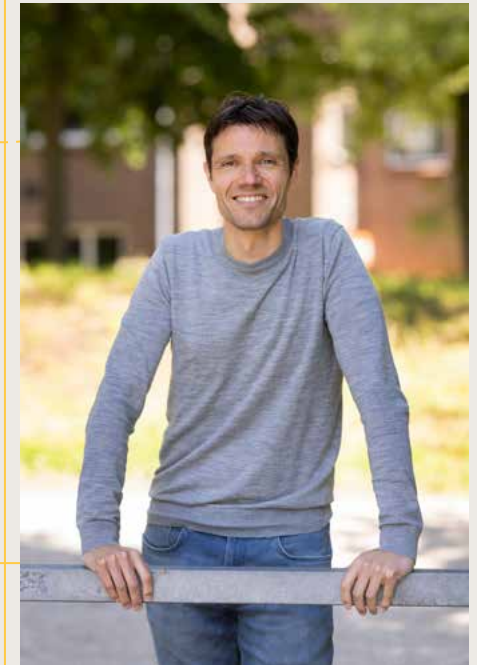


Photo Lars van den Brink



By Sjoerd de Jong
7 May 2026, NRC

The Dutch slave trade involved many more victims than previously thought, from countries and periods “that we do not have in view.” Leendert van der Valk has written a book about it.

He arranged for an attic full of scholars from all corners of the world to spend a warm October day in 2024 googling together how many people had ever lived in slavery under the Dutch flag. The thirty academics were fellows at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS) in Amsterdam, where Leendert van der Valk was working on a book about the history of slavery.

Some came back frustrated with nothing; others with widely varying figures. All the Dutch participants dug up one and the same number: “600,000 Africans,” about 5 per cent of all those transported in the transatlantic slave trade. But that could not be right. Where was the Asian part of the Dutch trade, Sri Lanka, India, the plantations in “the East”? There the figure of “1.5 million” people enslaved under Dutch rule.

Van der Valk (45) made these “forgotten places, forgotten people” the subject of his book, which has just been published. He consulted a load of recent historical research and delved into the archives. He arrived at very different estimates from the standard “600,000 Africans” of Wikipedia and schoolbooks: millions of people once lived under Dutch slavery. In *Forgotten Places, Forgotten People* (Boom publishers), he offers an “atlas” of the Dutch history of slavery: a series of historical stories from lesser-known regions, from Tobago to Angola, Taiwan and Japan. In addition, he presents a meticulous calculation of the numbers of people involved, based on a long list of archival material and historical research.

You are a music journalist, including for NRC, and a journalism lecturer at the University of Amsterdam. How did this ball start rolling?

“Actually, it began with music. I have always been interested in cultural exchange between continents. When was African music first heard in America? Then, of course, you end up with the history of slavery. Then *The New York Times* came

out with the ‘1619’ project, about the first enslaved Africans transported to America. I read that and thought: hey, that was an English ship, but with a Dutch privateering commission. I wrote a piece about that, and then I started looking for those kinds of stories.”

Your conclusion is: the Dutch history of slavery is much broader, both in time and place, than that standard “600,000” of the transatlantic route.

“Certainly. There are all kinds of places and groups of people connected to it that we do not have in view. Guyana, where more people were once enslaved under Dutch rule than in Suriname; Tobago; islands in the Caribbean; Madagascar; Mozambique; and islands in the Indonesian archipelago, where slavery continued in some places into the twentieth century. The problem is that the transatlantic route has now more or less become the benchmark. It is also fairly well documented; after all, it concerned trade. But then you leave an enormous amount out of account: children who were born into slavery, abducted people who died before they were put on transport, the whole Dutch slavery around the Indian Ocean. Figures about that have to be gathered from all kinds of sources. I was amazed by that: How come we don’t know this? To be honest, I also began to get annoyed that those 600,000 keep recurring, in schoolbooks, in exhibitions, in the king’s apologies. Fortunately, more attention has recently been paid to the broader story.”

You are not a historian yourself. Did that matter?

“Well, all the stories were read by specialists. The fact that I am not a historian also means that I sometimes ask different questions. When exactly were people first enslaved by the Dutch? That is really a journalistic question. That is how I came to the voyage of Cornelis de Houtman, the first Dutch colonial voyage, during which he enslaved two Indigenous men on Madagascar. Off the African coast he met Admiral Joris van Medemblick, with a cargo of ‘Sugar and Blacks, mostly female persons,’ on the way to the slave market in Lisbon. That was in 1595! Whereas in every history booklet you read that Dutch slavery only really became serious in 1637, when Elmina was captured, the Portuguese stronghold on the African Gold Coast.





But in 1595 De Houtman already encounters five Dutch ships on their way to the slave market in Portugal, and he himself enslaves two children.” Van der Valk arrives at 3.3 million to 5.3 million people who lived in slavery in Dutch colonies between 1600 and 1900, and 4.1 to 6.3 million people if victims who died before they were put on transport are included.

Those are wide margins. How solid are these new numbers?

“As far as I am concerned, they are estimates that at least show that the figure of 600,000 is far from complete. It remains difficult, of course, because, for example, deaths before transport were not recorded, children were often counted only as half or as a third, and mortality and birth rates are often difficult to establish. You have to extrapolate on the basis of the available sources. I had a lot of contact with historical demographers in Nijmegen. I consistently used conservative assumptions. One example is the number of children, which is very difficult to calculate.”

Is ‘chattel slavery’ on plantations in the West really comparable with slavery in the East?

“There is a persistent idea that slavery in the VOC area was less severe. Now I find it problematic in any case to say that one kind of slavery was ‘less severe’ than another. But there is also simply not much basis for thinking that. There were plantations in Indonesia and on the Banda Islands too. And it is questionable whether domestic slavery, which occurred frequently in Asia, as it did in Suriname or on the Antilles, was so much less harsh. Those people were also legally the property of their masters. Hereditary slavery existed there too. It is the same colonial system.”

What shocked you most about those figures?

“The share of children overall. Every time I delved into such a voyage or story, I came across them. The slave trade was, to such a large extent, child trafficking. I had never really realised that properly. This is not always apparent from the surviving figures, because children were sometimes counted as only half a person, or sometimes as a third. So then there is a chance that it says ‘so many pieces on board,’ but one piece may in fact

be three persons. Houtman, the one from the voyage of 1595, also enslaves a number of people on Java. They manage to escape again. But those too were children. To calculate child mortality in slavery, I worked together with those historical demographers. We worked with data from Suriname, because that provided us with the most complete figures.”

And then there was Guyana, another forgotten Dutch colony.

“Yes, certainly. Until 1814 it was Dutch. And of course we often do not realise that at all, because it was so long ago. But research shows that about 100,000 people were living there in slavery when it became British. That was far more than the number in Suriname. One of the stories in my book concerns a Dutchman in Leiden who had grown up in Guyana, and at one point received a great deal of money because the British abolish slavery and compensate planters. Yes. And he still had a plantation. So there is someone in Leiden, and suddenly he receives a great deal of money because until then he still kept people in slavery in a colony that is not generally remembered as Dutch. I believe that around 16 per cent of that total British compensation ended up in Dutch hands.”

You also pay attention to Indigenous enslaved people, another forgotten group.

“Yes, certainly. Fairly little is known about that in the Dutch context. Yet we know that there were enslaved Indigenous people in New Amsterdam too. Among the Ramapo-Munsee, who live north of New York, you still come across Dutch surnames; De Vries becomes Defreese. It is often said that we know little about it, and consequently little research has been conducted into it. Whereas in the sources you quite regularly find references to Indigenous people, especially in the seventeenth century. The difference is that Indigenous enslaved people did not have to be transported across an ocean, so you do not find them in the trade lists of ships.”

Your calculations do not address the economic dimension, the money.

“I actually find that economic approach a bit problematic, because it limits your view. Many of the

sources and archives are based on it; it is all driven by trade. But then you miss whole groups, such as children born into slavery who did not survive their first year of life.”

What would you say to someone who says: not another book about the history of slavery?

“That it may seem to be in the past, but that it still has an effect every day. In racism, but also in the global distribution of wealth and opportunities. And that there is so much that we still do not properly know or have mapped out. Or would prefer to forget. I also discuss a ‘forgotten’ genocide in the book. We all know J.P. Coen’s massacre on the Banda Islands, but on another small island there had already been a kind of rehearsal for genocide. There, the penny really dropped: aha, this is how we can do it. First depopulate, and then bring other people there.”

Where did slavery exist the longest under Dutch authority?

“In the Indies. In the vast archipelago, however, the abolition of slavery in 1860, three years earlier than in Suriname, was very half-hearted. It actually happened mainly on Java or the Banda Islands. But when the Netherlands laid a colonial claim to the entire archipelago in the nineteenth century, slavery was still widespread there; it involved hundreds of thousands of people.”

But that was not created by the Dutch, was it?

“No, but they did live formally under Dutch authority and under Dutch law, which prohibited slavery. Money continued to be made from these people for generations. The last place where the law was ultimately applied was the little island of Samosir, in a lake on Sumatra, in 1914. So as far as I am concerned, the history of slavery runs from 1595 to 1914.”



Leendert van der Valk:
Forgotten Places, Forgotten People. An Atlas of the Dutch History of Slavery.
Boom, 472 pp.
€29.90





Podcast: Room to explore

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NIAS publications

NIAS Studies in Academic Freedom and Epistemic Diversity

What does it mean to do free scholarship in a world of growing pressures? This book series explores that question, and what is at stake for scholars, institutions and the pursuit of knowledge itself.

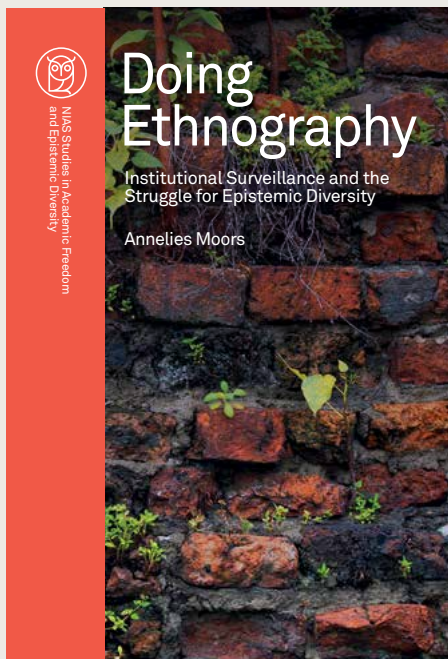
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This series of monographs and edited volumes, published by NIAS with Leuven University Press, brings together insights from the institute's fellows, alumni and partners. Each volume addresses the structural challenges facing scholars, disciplines, knowledge domains and academic institutions as they navigate political, policy-related, economic and societal pressures. The series opens a conversation about where scholars and disciplines stand today, where we want them to go and what it will take to get there.

Volumes

- + Vol 1. Doing Ethnography, by Annelies Moors
- + Vol 2. Citizenship in Nativist Times, by Menno Hurenkamp and Tamar de Waal (eds.)



Volume 1: Doing Ethnography

Academic research has come under growing institutional scrutiny over recent decades. This book traces the rise of ethical review procedures, open science mandates and integrity protocols, and examines how these developments shape ethnographic practice in concrete ways. It explores key tensions around informed consent, anonymity, researcher positionality and the sharing of field notes.

The book argues that contemporary academia tends to impose universal, bureaucratic forms of regulatory ethics – frameworks rooted in quantitative and positivist paradigms that sit uneasily with ethnography's interpretive, immersive approach. In response, it calls for a situated, context-sensitive ethics of care that takes the specificities of ethnographic fieldwork seriously. At its core, the book is both a critical reflection on institutional power and a plea for the epistemic diversity on which academic freedom ultimately depends.

Annelies Moors is an anthropologist and professor emerita at the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, University of Amsterdam.

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Volume 2: Citizenship in Nativist Times

by Menno Hurenkamp and Tamar de Waal (eds.)

Who counts as a real citizen – and who gets to decide? Over recent decades, debates about diversity, belonging and social cohesion have grown sharper and more urgent. Populist and nativist movements increasingly claim the power to define citizenship, often at the expense of democratic principles, the rule of law and the welfare state.

This edited volume takes those tensions as its starting point. Through case studies and theoretical reflections, contributions by leading international scholars examine how citizenship is being restricted, reimagined and reclaimed across its political, social, cultural and legal dimensions. From rights and representation to social welfare and public discourse, the volume maps the fault lines of contemporary democratic life – and asks what it means to belong in an age of deepening division.

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We would love to discuss options with you. Please contact Marlous Willemsen at marlous.willemsen@nias.knaw.nl.

How to donate

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We thank our partners

NIAS thrives through collaboration. The breadth and impact of our fellowship programmes would not be possible without the commitment of our partners, whose support enables us to create more opportunities for researchers, journalists, writers and artists. Together, we foster the conditions for independent thinking and contribute to strengthening academic, journalistic and artistic freedom.

We are deeply grateful to Maastricht University, the University of Amsterdam and the Royal Academy for Arts and Sciences 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. Thanks to this support, the call for applications to our Safe Haven Fellowship Programme remains open year-round, ensuring greater accessibility for scholars at risk.

NIAS works with a wide range of partners in the Netherlands and abroad. Here, we gratefully acknowledge those with whom we jointly make fellowships possible:

Lorentz Center, Netherlands Commission for UNESCO, Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH), Golestan Foundation, Instituut Gak, Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, Fonds Bijzondere Journalistieke Projecten, L'Oréal Belgilux & Nederland, Institut français NL & Stichting France Nederland Cultuurfonds, Willem F. Duisenberg Fellowship Foundation, Nederlands Letterenfonds, J. Gonda Fund, City of Amsterdam, KB National Library of the Netherlands, NEMO Science Museum, Maastricht University, University of Amsterdam and the Royal Academy for Arts and Sciences (KNAW).

Contributing photographers and artists: Richard Kofi, Jonna Bruinsma, Almichael Fraay, ANP/ Maarten Hartman, Robert Boland, Dennis van de Winter, Erik Smits, Marieke de Bra, Annick Elzenga, Laura Tancredi.

IMAGES

Page 2: Window in the NIAS office building, overlooking the rooftops

Page 11: White stone pillars. Photo by Laura Tancredi.

Pages 22–23: Mangrove vegetation on the beach near Pasuruan, 1937. Wereldmuseum, inventory no. TM-10012650. Public Domain Anonymous 70 EU.

Pages 39–40: Window overlooking the NIAS garden

Pages 58–59: A selection from Pet van de

Luijtgarden's collections and those of other collectors at the Jaarbeurs in Utrecht. Photo by Maarten Hartman/ANP.

Page 78: Louise Bourgeois, *Eyes*. Photo by Robert Boland. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum.

Pages 84, 87 and 88: Illustrations by Richard Kofi.

Page 91: Owl in the NIAS Library

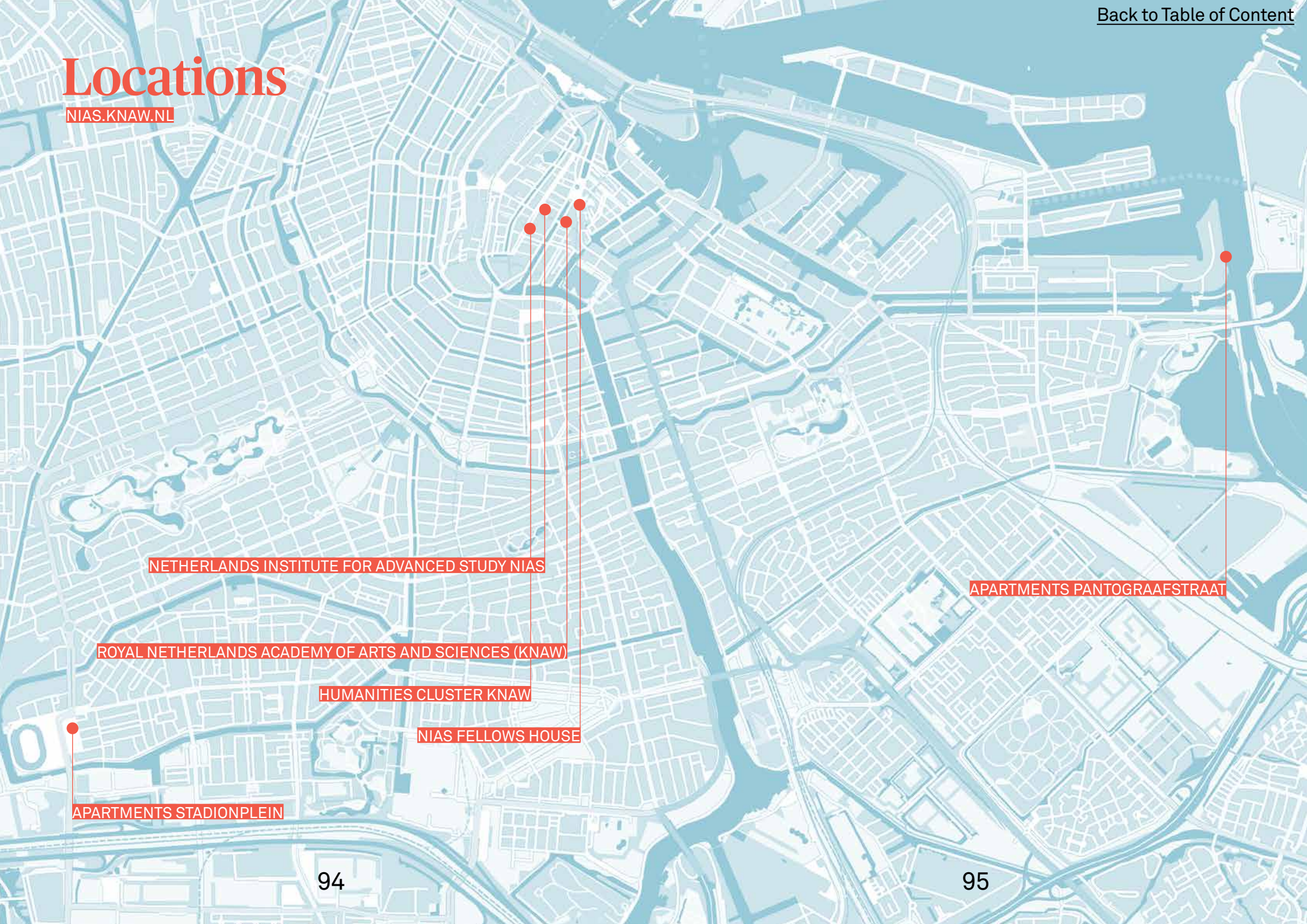
Page 99: Lamp decorated with fellows' thank-you notes, presented as a gift to the NIAS staff.

Page 103: Window in the NIAS attic



Locations

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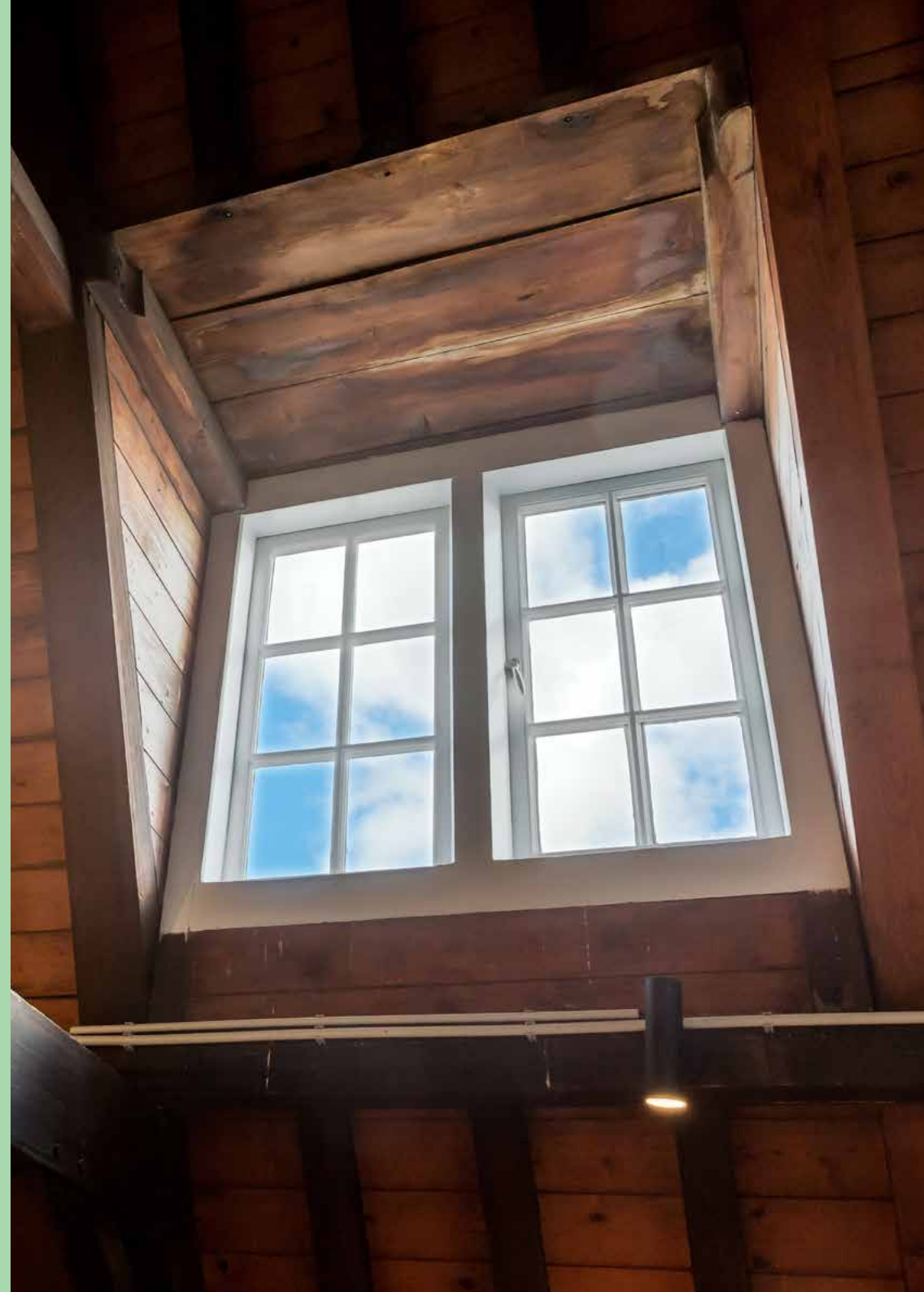
NIAS FELLOWS HOUSE

APARTMENTS STADIONPLEIN

APARTMENTS PANTOGRAAFSTRAAT

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Fellows 2026/ 2027

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PROPOSALS
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15 JANUARY
2027

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 2026-2027 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 independent institute for advanced study, NIAS was founded in Wassenaar in 1970 and has been situated in Amsterdam's academic heart since 2017. It was the first institute of its kind in continental Europe and the third worldwide, following Princeton and Stanford in the United States. NIAS is part of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

