

VOX

INTERVIEW
SPECIAL

Gosse van der Meer
gets paid to cycle:

'A GOOD TRICK'

Professor **Maike Cima** / Student association **The Navigators**
Former Rector **Bert van der Zwaan** / Taxidermist **Lucas de Boer**
Anti-feminist **Charlotte Blaak** / Ambassador **Ardi Stoios-Braken**



Het Hulpfonds helpt!



Het Hulpfonds biedt aan alle collega's van het umc en de universiteit financiële ondersteuning. Wij helpen met financieel advies, budgetbegeleiding en renteloze leningen.

Wil je meer informatie?
E-mail: info@hulpfondsradboud.nl | Telefoon: (024) 309 33 10 | www.hulpfondsradboud.nl

Radboud Universiteit  Radboudumc

Atmospheric locations



Soeterbeek Study and Conference Centre
Room for concentration

www.ru.nl/soeterbeek

reserveringsbureau@fb.ru.nl or phone +31 (0)24 361 58 25

The ideal venue for courses, seminars, meetings, trainings and conferences of one or more days. Experience the inspiring tranquillity.





Faculty Club Huize Heyendael
The meeting place on campus

www.ru.nl/facultyclub

facultyclub@fb.ru.nl or phone +31 (0)24 361 59 79

Lunch and dinner a la carte, as well as package deals for receptions, dinners and parties. Fully equipped meeting rooms!



Radboud Universiteit 

Kies een breder perspectief:

Maak een vliegende start als verzekeringsarts bij het UWV.

Laastig om een opleidings- of onderzoeksplek te vinden? Met jouw opleiding als basisarts heb je veel meer kansen dan je wellicht denkt. Verzekeringsarts is een beschermd specialisme met een eigen opleiding tot specialist. De grote uitdaging is dat je veel breder moet leren kijken dan diagnose en behandeling. Naast medische kennis gebruik je juridische en sociale expertise om te onderzoeken welke mogelijkheden iemand nog heeft om te functioneren. Jouw oordeel heeft vaak een enorme impact - niet alleen op de gezondheid, maar op het hele leven van een cliënt. Dat is nogal wat, maar de arbeidsvoorwaarden zijn dan ook ideaal. Reken op een heel goed salaris, training on the job en geen onmogelijke werktijden. Zo blijft er genoeg ruimte voor jezelf.



Hasret Aydemir
verzekeringsarts
in opleiding



Kijk je graag verder dan diagnose en behandeling?
Kijk op brederperspectief.nl

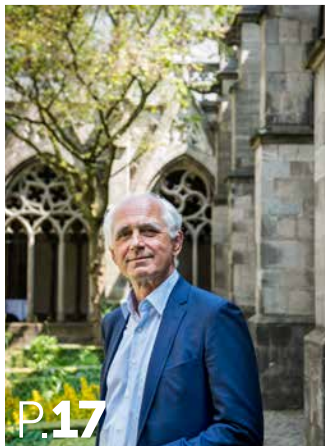




P.6



P.12



P.17



P.22



P.28



P.34



P.40

EDITORIAL

INTERVIEWS

This Summer Vox edition can be summarised in four words: from Kranenburg to Karachi. Just across the border lives Gosse van der Meer, a cyclo-cross racer who talks as fast as he pedals his bike. He travels all over the world for races, but also because he wants to be a cartographer. In the Southern trip point Vaals, Maaïke Cima also combines science and sports: when she's finished lecturing, the Professor of Forensic Psychopathology teaches ballet to girls in pink tutus at her own dance school.


Last year in France, the Christian student association NSN lost three members in a skiing holiday. In this Vox edition, the Nijmegen Navigators talk about how they dealt with their grief.

Slightly to the North, in Arnhem, we meet Charlotte Blaak, who is opposed to feminism. The student believes men are simply more suited to top positions, an idea that doesn't make her particularly popular among Nijmegen 'linkie-winkies' (as Charlotte calls them).

A ten-hour flight away, in Karachi, the most dangerous city in the world according to *The Independent*, Ambassador Ardi Stoios-Braken conversely does everything in her power to combat women's oppression.

Have a great summer, wherever you're headed!

Annemarie Haverkamp
Editor-in-Chief Vox

 www.facebook.com/voxweb.nl

 @voxnieuws

VOX NR. 7 06/2018 CONTENTS

P.6 / **MAAIKE CIMA** Teaches ballet after her lectures

P.12 / **THE NAVIGATORS** On the loss of three of their members

P.17 / **BERT VAN DER ZWAAN** 'Our education system is overloaded'

P.22 / **LUCAS BOER** 'I think of death as the end'

P.28 / **CHARLOTTE BLAAK** Is an anti-feminist

P.34 / **GOSSE VAN DER MEER** 'I love cycling through the forest'

P.40 / **ARDI STOIOS-BRAKEN** 'I've never felt afraid here'

RISING STAR

JOOST VAN WIJNGAARDEN



What to do with a million? Okay, we're definitely exaggerating, but since winning the TV quiz *Eén tegen 100* student Joost van

Wijngaarden, a communication sciences student, is a great deal wealthier. To be exact, he won 182,305 euros, although he'll have to pay a 30% gambling tax on this. Van Wijngaarden certainly won't have to worry about his study debts any more. He himself remains very level-headed, and hopes that people won't act differently towards him now: "I hope my life will stay like it was."

DULY NOTED

'He talked for almost two hours, but the time flew because it was really interesting'

Linde, in group 8 at De Hazesprong primary school, was one of the pupils who was visited by a professor (in toga!) during Radboud Kids. She was very positive about the story told by Professor Bas Bloem (Neurological Movement Disorders).

IN THE NEWS

DAY-TO-DAY NEWS:
VOXWEB.NL/INTERNATIONAL

Missing Social media was suddenly filled with a photo of Glenn Fiers, a student of development studies and a barman at Café Faber. On 7 May the police called this an urgent case. A week later, however, Fiers was found – abroad. No details are known, but we understand that the Belgian student is 'in good health'.

International students Universities need more instruments to channel the flow of incoming students. Together with HBOs, the universities voiced this in a letter in May to Minister of Education, Culture and Science Ingrid van Engelshoven. The institutions would like to implement a

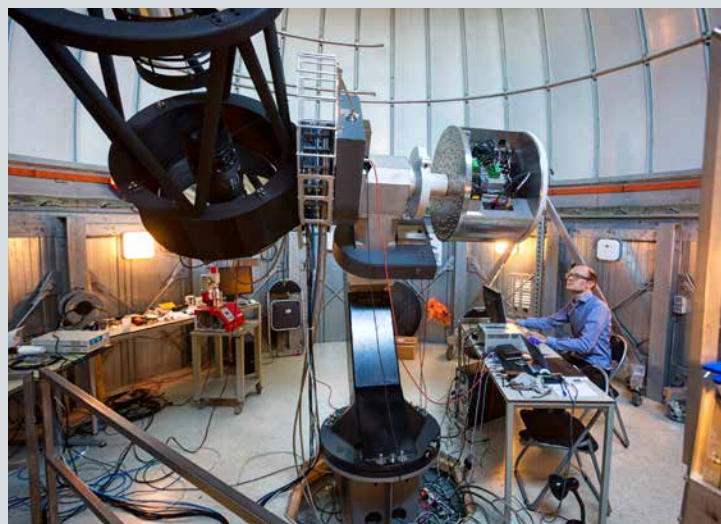


PHOTO: DICK VAN AALST

MeerLICHT The culmination of years of hard work: on 25 May Nijmegen opened its MeerLICHT telescope in South Africa. The instrument was designed in the Huygensgebouw under the supervision of Professor Paul Groot. What makes MeerLICHT special is that the optical telescope looks at the same point in space as a gigantic radio telescope. This is a first. Groot hopes to be able to learn more about exploding stars, the transfer of gasses between stars and white dwarves who suddenly appear and then disappear.



PHOTO: DICK VAN AALST

Radboud Kids On 31 May 95 Professors cycled to primary schools in the region in the context of the University's 95th anniversary. They taught lectures wearing togas. Two Group 8 boys from the Nijmegen School Association 2 immediately decided to become a Professor. "Then I'll get one of those outfits too."

numerus fixus for the English-language tracks. In turn, the minister presented a Letter to Parliament in which she voiced her agreement with the universities in that respect. At the same time she also gave the universities more scope to offer programmes in English.

New action group

With its slogan *We invite you to really change perspective*, a new action group presented itself on campus in mid-May. There were not many present at Changing Perspective's first public activity, an information stand and lectures. But they've got plenty of ideas. This group of students and staff opposes the university's earning model and the related problems of work pressure and market forces.

Error rectified For a number of years, six hundred foreign staff at Radboud University and 270 at Radboud university medical center had received too

little salary. An error by the salary administration department, who accidentally paid out a lower holiday allowance and a lower year-end bonus to staff who participate in the '30% ruling'. The university has reserved 3.1 million euros to rectify this error, and the hospital 1.5 million.

Vidis Fourteen researchers in Nijmegen could raise the flag earlier this month: they were awarded a Vidi grant amounting to a maximum of 800,000 euros. The university has eight laureates, the Max Planck Institute and Radboud university medical centre five. Never before has Nijmegen received so many Vidis in one round.

Student council Het The University Student Council is still balanced: just like last year, AKKURaad and asap each won four seats in the elections. The voter turnout was 37 percent, one percent less than last year.

Well-being What happened to the results of last year's survey, which revealed that many students suffer from stress and loneliness? It led to many group discussions that helped the University formulate action points. Among other things we need a cultural shift to cure us of our obsession with excellence. In the meantime, the student council is starting to grumble: high time we get moving on this issue, and they think the action points aren't concrete enough.

Student sports For the fifth time in six years, Team Nijmegen won the Great Dutch Student Championship (GDSC). 'We' were the best in the categories boxing, gymnastics, handball, badminton, volleyball, cycling and triathlon. The tournament's organiser, Wageningen, had to settle for second place.

COLOPHON

Vox is the independent magazine of the Radboud University.

Editorial address: Thomas van Aquinostraat 1, Postbus 9104, 6500 HE Nijmegen, Tel: 024-3612112
redactie@vox.ru.nl
www.voxweb.nl / @voxnieuws

Editors: Leoni Andriessen, Annemarie Haverkamp (hoofd-redacteur), Ken Lambeets, Mathijs Noij, Jozien Wijkhuijs, Martine Zuidweg (bladcoördinator)

Proofreading: Lydia van Aert

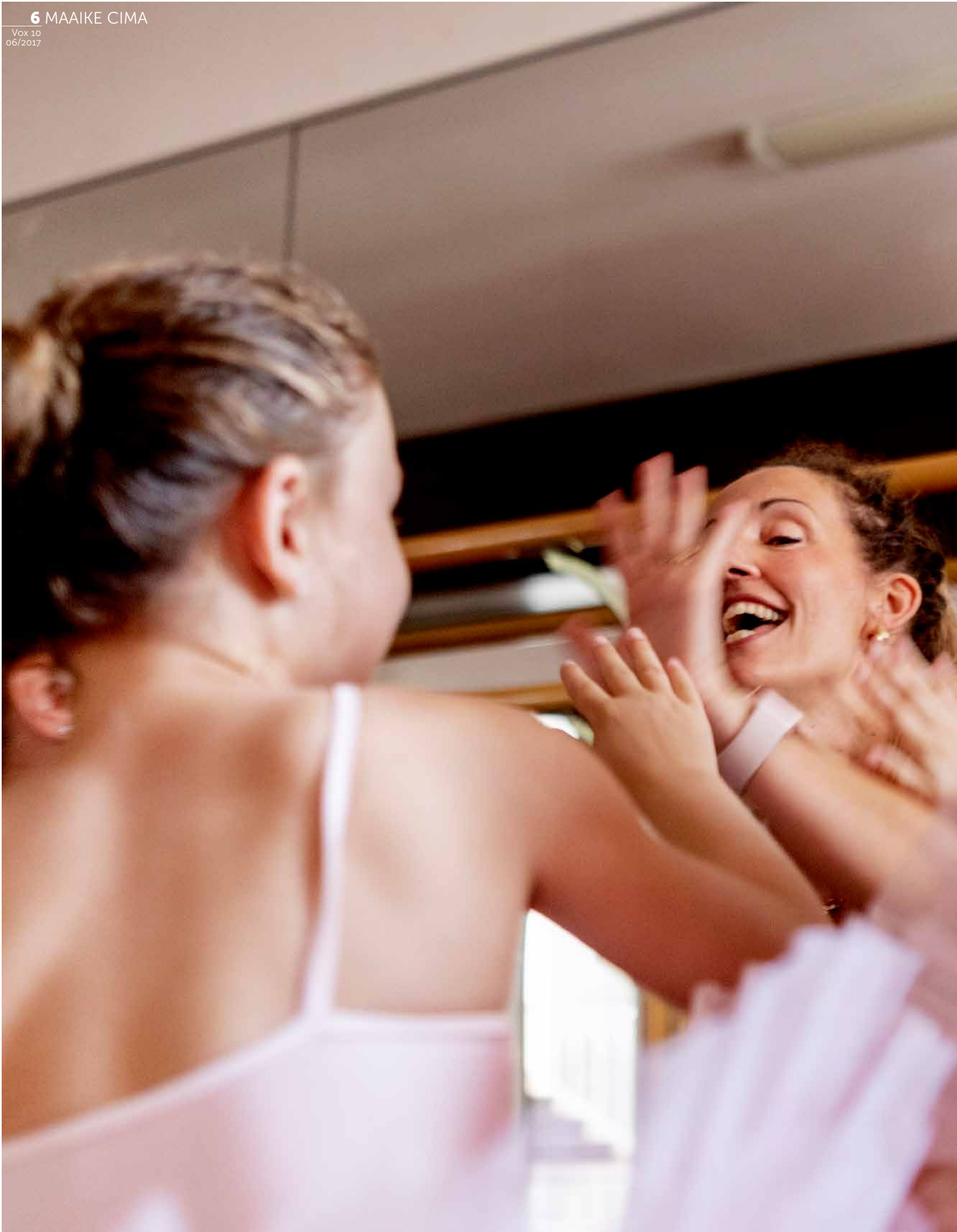
Columnist: Lucienne van der Geld
Contributors to this issue: Sander Bisselink, Daniëlle van Dijn, Linda van der Pol

Photos: Dick van Aalst, Bert Beelen, Marjolein van Diejen, Duncan de Fey, Erik van 't Hullenaar

Design: gloedcommunicatie, Nijmegen

Advertising: Bureau van Vliet
Tel: 023-5714745
zandvoort@bureauvanvliet.com
advertentie@vox.ru.nl

Print: MediaCenter Rotterdam
Translation: Radboud In'to Languages, Translation & Editing, Nijmegen, Telephone: 024-3616129





THE PROFESSOR IS ALSO A BALLET TEACHER

When academia failed to meet her expectations, Maaïke Cima, Professor of Forensic Psychopathology, opened a ballet school. The brightly coloured tutus contrast with her research on the conscience development of children: Why do some children develop psychopathic traits and others not?

Text: Linda van der Pol / **Photography:** Duncan de Fey

S

Six girls gather around her. Some wear tutus, others a summer dress. As storms rage through the rest of the country, here at its most South Eastern tip, in Vaals, summer still reigns.

“Don’t pay attention to her,” says Maaïke Cima, Professor of Forensic Psychopathology, pointing to the journalist at the back of the room. “She’s from my work at the university.”

“You work at the university?” asks an eight-year old.

Cima, “Maaïke” to the girls, nods. “Come on! Let’s get started at the barre.”

A moment later, the girls are lined up in a row. “*Grand plié!* And stretch! Squeeze your buttocks, pull in your stomach. *Plié.* Well done!”

The University is a long way away: an hour and a half by car. After her last appointment on campus, Cima hurries home. She picks up her youngest daughter (2) from day-care, gives the other children at home a hug, and waits for her entrepreneur husband Remy to come home. Then she jumps into the car again.

Three days a week, ballet classes are taught at the Cimarella dance school, with Cima doing all the teaching herself. The school is located in her first house, in the centre of Vaals, which she and her husband kept on after their move. When the former tenants moved out, she seized the opportunity. Her bedroom is now the changing room, the living room the dance studio with the wall-to-wall mirror, and the office a storage room. This is where she spent many evening, fifteen years ago, writing her PhD. She completed her thesis, on crime-related amnesia, in two years. “I was pregnant with my first child, so I had to hurry. On the day of my defence I already had a big belly.” How did she manage it? Actually Cima doesn’t understand why completing a PhD should take four or five years. With a bit of discipline, you can do it much faster.

This seems to be her life motto. Before being appointed at Radboud University, she worked as a researcher and lecturer at the universities of Tilburg and Maastricht, and at the Open University in Heerlen. She conducted research

at various detention centres, including the Rheinische Landeslinik in Duren (Germany), less than an hour’s drive across the border. In the meantime, the first baby was followed by another five: she has four sons and two daughters. The oldest is fourteen, the youngest two.

“When we go into a restaurant, the other guests look at us with something akin to panic: this will turn into chaos! By the time we leave, though, everyone is saying: ‘What a nice family!’” says Cima proudly.

And then there is the dance school she opened four years ago that has 45 pupils. “I occasionally get stressed at the thought of the washing accumulating,” she says lightly. “But I feel much more balanced than I did at first.”

In her office in the Spinoza building, decorated with pink chair cushions, she talks about her ballet school as a “hobby that got out of hand”.

Cima, who as a toddler paraded through the house dressed in dance costumes for whole days, took her first ballet class at the age of 4 and went on to dance for many years. After completing secondary school she even joined the Dance Academy Tilburg. “But once I graduated, I realised that I didn’t want to pursue a professional dance career. It’s such a hard world and you’re always away from home. I also missed the intellectual challenge. And my perspective had changed: dancing had always been my great love, but then I met my husband.” She then studied Psychology and easily slipped into doing research. But things didn’t go quite according to plan.

“Doing research is heaven on earth. Solving puzzles, looking things up, writing them down – I loved it. But in academia you rarely get a pat on the back. In fact, when you get feedback, it’s generally negative. From reviewers who tell you to change all sorts of things in your article to grant providers who find your proposal not substantiated or innovative enough. I won a VENI grant and then, for a long time, I didn’t get any more big personal grants. “If it doesn’t work out,” I joked, “I can always teach ballet.” I said this with increasing frequency, until one day I realised that I meant it.

Now I’ve got something nobody has any say over, except me: it’s lovely. This is my school, my pupils, and I do what I like and what feels right.”

Lack of conscience

Today, Cima’s pupils practice for the twice-yearly ballet performance with the entire school. “And now you let yourself fall to the floor. Not like an elephant, like a mouse,” she instructs. “Come on! Let’s go through the whole thing one more time, from the top.” Her dancers have worked up quite a sweat: they keep making a dash for their drinking bottles. “Remember, in two weeks’ time, we’re going to perform at the old people’s home,” she reminds the youngest children as they leave – the next group is already waiting. To a girl who says she can’t make it next time: “You’re going to see your grandma that day? Just bring her along!”

**‘SOME CHILDREN
DISPLAY SIGNS OF
LACK OF CONSCIENCE
VERY EARLY ON’**



The tutus, the dance moves, the girls' giggling and chatting are in sharp contrast to Cima's day job. At the University, she created a Master's specialisation in Forensic Orthopedagogics and carried out a number of studies on behavioural problems in young people. She is currently studying how conscience develops in children. Why do some children display extreme behavioural problems, even psychopathic traits, and others not?

"Behavioural problems, in some cases even criminal behaviour, usually result from environmental factors. Think of shocking events, trauma, or a person's social environment. But traits that relate to behavioural problems such as cold-bloodedness often also have biological and neurobiological components. Oxytocin for example, a neuropeptide, links social contact to feelings of happiness and therefore plays an important role in human attachment. I look at whether this substance is low in people who grow up cold-blooded, and whether it plays a role in psychopathic traits and lack of conscience."

Apparently some children display signs of lack of conscience very early on. Last year Cima performed an experiment with toddlers at the Baby Lab. Two hand puppets each made a drawing, while the toddler looked on and drew with them. Then one of the puppets disappeared backstage, and the other seized the opportunity to tear up its companion's drawing. "Some toddlers respond by saying: 'Don't do that!', and if this doesn't help, out of compassion they give their own drawing to the victim puppet. Other toddlers find the puppet show simply amusing. It's interesting to see where these differences come from and what they correlate with."

My most important research question is: How do you address these problems? For example, does it help, in addition to regular treatments, to administer oxytocin? I think our most important task, as scientists and therapists, is to avoid these young children turning into criminals later in life."

In her master's programme, Cima mostly trains students to be counsellors in institutions like juvenile prisons and closed youth welfare institutions. She also followed a course in cognitive behaviour therapy for a while, but didn't complete it. "Most of the time, clients are asked to talk about their thoughts and feelings. But many of them can't really express themselves: they are not very strong verbally. I didn't feel I could help them with verbal therapy."

Cima worked for a while as a therapist for a mental health centre for children and young people. There she had clients, children or their parents, who had gone through horrifying experiences. "Up to a point, it's great if you feel empathy as a therapist, but it's also important to keep some distance. I couldn't do it. I couldn't tell people that life goes on. Instead I would end up crying too. Maybe it was because I was pregnant at the time, I don't know, but still: 'Oh my God, it was so horrible...'"



**'AFTERWARDS
I ALWAYS HAVE
THREE TIMES AS
MUCH ENERGY
AS BEFORE'**



BIO
MAAIKE CIMA

Born
in Heerlen (1973)

Study
Dance Academy Tilburg
and university degree
and PhD in Psychology
from Maastricht
University

Despacito

It's almost 8 p.m. The girls have learned a new dance routine, to the tune of *Despacito*, and giggle thinking about it: "Phew, that bit with the hips, Maaïke is the only one who can do it!" Now it's time to rush home, so that Remy, who put the youngest boys to bed, can go and pick up the older ones from their Kung-Fu lesson, a few villages down the road.

Cima still has a number of things she has to do: eat, shower, prepare six piles of sandwiches for tomorrow, and work through her emails. Only then will she join her husband on the couch for an episode of *Designated Survivors* or *Travelers*.

It doesn't matter: "Sometimes after a whole day in Nijmegen, I'm so tired I really have to pull myself together

to go to the ballet school. But afterwards, I always have three times as much energy as before."

Of course, she says, this is what physical exercise does for you. It raises your energy level and allows you to release tension. "I think a lot of problems young children experience would disappear if they ate healthy food and got enough exercise."

This is why she consciously stimulates her children to do lots of sports: Kung-Fu, competitive swimming, and in the summer, horse-riding. "My oldest children are quite active. They don't have ADHD or anything; they're just boys. But without sports I'm sure they'd be a lot wilder." She's not particularly bothered about the logistics of all these sports clubs. If you live in Vaals, you're used to getting in the car and all the children do the same sports. Except her five-year old: "She does ballet, with her mum as teacher."

She's consciously chosen not to organise talent clubs and selection rounds. "Can you see me reading out a list like that, with some children being ecstatic while others go home in tears? I think it's terrible to give children this young a minority complex. Because they're sure to take it to heart. They don't think: 'I can't dance,' but 'I'm not good at anything...!' Teenagers in particular are really sensitive to these things." Cima has no time for trouble-making and elbowing your way to the top: a legacy of the ballet academy, where such practices were rife.

She doesn't want to think of her ballet lessons as a form of therapy. But it does go further than dance and choreography: she teaches children to work together, to develop discipline and respect.

"This is a safe environment. The girls know each other well, and they respect each other's individuality. Some pupils are quick to conclude that they can't do something. They're insecure. I teach them that the words 'I can't' don't exist in my ballet lessons. And by the end of the lesson, they can do it too. When I see them perform later, doing what they thought they couldn't do, I hope these experiences will help them in other situations in their lives.

I don't want to make it into something therapeutic, so I don't talk about it. But I observe them and I see that it works: they feel more self-confident after a lesson or performance. This is a source of great satisfaction to me."

Teaching is extremely useful, says Cima. She tries to help her students, organises internships and makes sure they are well-equipped for the world of forensics. "I mostly do research because I love it. But I realise that my fundamental research is just one small building block. It can only create change in combination with other people's blocks. I'm not under the illusion that I can save the world with my research."

In the end, I'm just happy if my dance lessons have a positive effect on my pupils, in whatever way. I hope they remember it later and think: 'Wow! That was so much fun.'" *

THE CONSOLATION OF GOD

Three students, members of the Christian student association the Navigators (NSN), died last year in an accident in the French Alps. They were buried in an avalanche. What kind of effect does this have on a student association?
'There was complete solidarity.'

Text: Annemarie Haverkamp / Photography: Bert Beelen







On the wall hangs a plaque with three names: Marcel, Mark and Timo. In the background the contours of a mountain ridge and a date: 7 March 2017. “It was a conscious choice not to add their photographs,” says Tessa Katerberg. “It was really traumatising, and it would be too confrontational to see their faces every time you enter the boardroom.”

Last year Tessa was a board member at the Christian student association NSN (Nijmegen Student Association the Navigators). She was the spokesperson at a press conference following the death by avalanche of three association members during a skiing trip in the French Alps.

For a long time, the students didn't want to give any interviews. Now that a year has gone by, they're ready to share what the accident did to their association. How it changed NSN, and how it changed them personally. How friendships deepened.

Journalist in the hall

Tuesday 7 March 2017. The NSN board is at a party organised by a fellow association in Rotterdam when they get a phone call from France. One of their members says something terrible has happened: three students wanted one last ride down the mountain on their snowboard. They went off-piste for a bit, and became disoriented due to sudden mist. An avalanche overtook them. Marcel was dead, the fate of Mark and Timo was as yet uncertain. “We could hardly take it in,” remembers Public Administration student Tessa. “It was terribly sad. I still remember that we prayed together, over the telephone. We in Rotterdam, they in France.” Together with the other board members,

she decided to drive back to Nijmegen. “I was the designated driver. During the drive we were all silent. We only got home around 3 a.m. We decided to meet the next morning at 11. Too late, as it turned out, but we didn't know that at the time.”

On the morning of 8 March, at 8 a.m., a news report is broadcast about a student from Nijmegen dying in a skiing accident. When the first NSN members arrive at the white villa on the Van Schaeck Mathonsingel where the association is located, a journalist is waiting for them in the hall. Tessa: “We were completely taken by surprise. I still don't understand how they were so quick to make the link with our association.” Colleagues from neighbouring association Phocas are kind enough to escort the journalist off the premises, but it soon becomes clear that the Navigators are on the radar of pretty much the entire Dutch press. It's not enough to inform their members, as media are already trying to reach them.

Tessa thinks she's 'slightly further removed' from the victims than her fellow board members, so she offers to speak to the press. “Together with the University we decided to hold a press conference. Just tell our story once, and that's it.” The Radboud University communications officer helps her prepare. It's a nerve-wrecking session, but also good in a way, as she remembers. “On a day like that, you really get into Do! mode. It's nicer to be doing something concrete than to really let what happened sink in.”

It seems to work. The army of camera people at the door dwindles. Kevin van Huet Lindeman, faithful member of NSN, recalls how annoyed he was with the media that day. Members who came to the villa would get microphones pushed into their faces. “You'd hear statements in the news like ‘students are coming together to cry and support each another’. What were we supposed to make of that? What was his point?” It was also annoying how some of the information was plain wrong. Tessa: “They would mix up names and ages, for example.”

More importantly, NSN members had other things on their mind. They felt worried and dejected. Seventeen travel companions and fellow NSN members were still in the French Alps. Kevin: “The three students who died were very active members. They were really at the heart of our association.” He was personally friends with two of them, and knew the third one quite well. He was working in Scherpenzeel when a housemate who'd gone along on the skiing trip called him with the bad news. “My father came to get me. He asked: ‘Do you want me to drive you home or to the association?’ I just wanted to be with friends who were in the same boat. To share how we felt.”

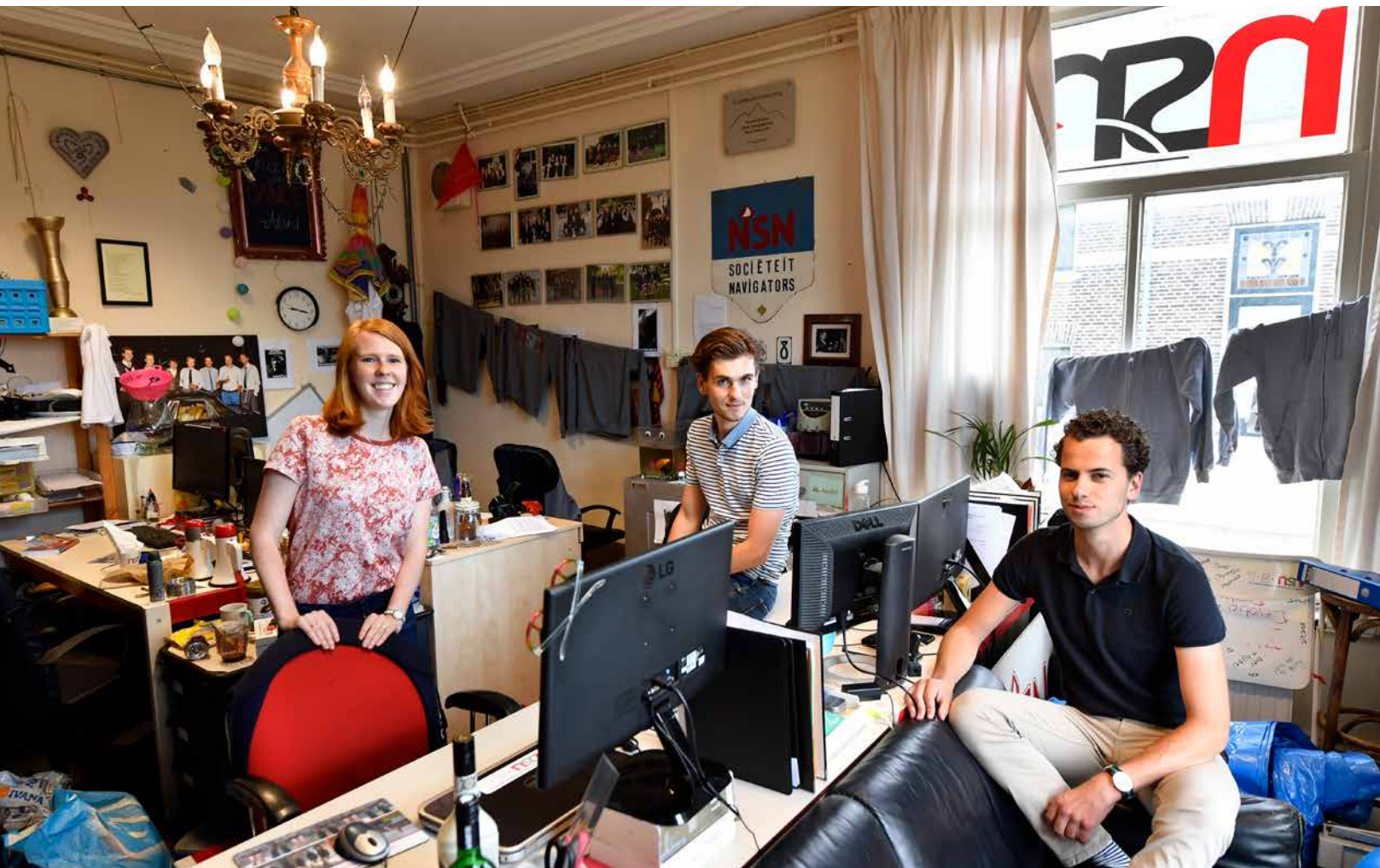
Hugo Bahlman was a second-year student in Law who'd only recently become a member of NSN. On Wednesday 8 March he was in a tutorial. “A friend of mine who was there too got a WhatsApp message. ‘It's about an NSN member.’ The news became more and more concrete. After three quarters of an hour we left to go to the villa.”

The association building got busier and busier as the

MARCEL, MARK AND TIMO COMMEMORATED

NSN is a Christian (formerly Protestant) student association with approximately two hundred members. On 7 March 2017, three of the association's members died in an avalanche. During a skiing trip organised by the association, they went off-piste on their snowboards. The body of HAN University of Applied Sciences student Marcel Koning (22) was found first. He was followed by student of Business Administration Timo Zoutewelle (21). On 19 March, an avalanche dog tracked down the body of Business Administration alumnus Mark Vroegindeweyj (25). A memorial place was set up at the Student Church, and another one in the association building on the Van Schaeck Mathonsingel. The villa that is home to NSN was open every night for a week. This was followed by a 'sober month' (no fraternity activities) and a number of commemorative moments were organised later in the year. A year later, the accident was remembered with a 'sober week' and a service in the Boskapel.

→ Tessa Katerberg, Hugo Bahlman (centre) and Kevin van Huet Lindenman in the association's boardroom



morning went on. Soon approximately 100 members were there, in Hugo's estimate.

Tessa: "We opened the big hall downstairs."

Hugo: "It was nice to be able to be together at such a difficult time."

The rest of the day was chaotic, but members automatically slipped into the role that best suited them. Some poured coffee; others stirred big pots of soup in the kitchen. Board members received mourning protocol instructions from fellow associations. The website had to go black. "There was complete solidarity," remembers Tessa. "Usually association members just hang out with their own club or their own fraternity, but this went completely beyond that. There was unity. It was amazing to see how people just wanted to help and only thought of what they could do to be useful. We all took care of each other."

At the villa the students prayed and in the evening they sang together. "That was really beautiful," says Tessa. "Singing brings you closer to God. Whether you feel very sad or only a little, it's something you can share. Wednesday

**'I DON'T KNOW
WHETHER
I WILL EVEN
GET ANSWERS'**

night is our regular association night and everyone was there – members and former members.”

NSN is a Christian association. What's the role of faith at times like this?

Tessa: “As board members, we found a lot of comfort in prayer – I don’t know how to explain it. You simply know that there are lots of people empathising and praying for you, and this gives you strength in a way, it helps you to keep going. We received so many cards from people – just random people – who wrote ‘we were in Valfréjus two weeks ago, we have such nice memories of our stay, and we’re praying for you.’”

Hugo: “It makes me feel proud to believe that there is a God up there. When you wonder why this accident happened – What was the point? – it gives me peace to think that God takes care of us. At the time I often prayed with others. Just for a bit, to seek support and hope in God. That’s the power of prayer.”

Kevin: “I don’t believe this was God’s plan, but I do believe He was a witness. He was there with those boys, and He was here with us. I recognise the feeling of being carried, even though it’s still a bit vague. I had doubts. If God was almighty, why didn’t He stop this from happening? But I was really happy to see that my questions were also welcome. We could lean on each other.”

Did the accident erode your trust in God?

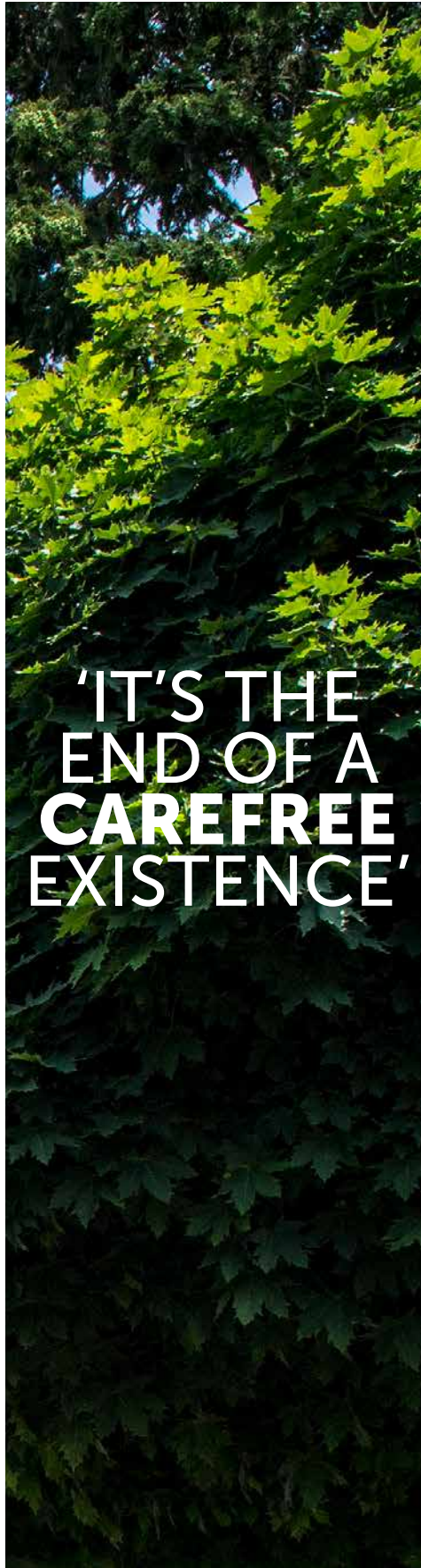
Tessa: “It didn’t for me. I don’t know why, but I was able to put the ‘why’ question aside, because I knew I would probably never know the answer.”

Kevin: “It did for me. I’m not yet sure what to do with it, it’s a process I’m going through. I don’t know whether I’ll ever find an answer, it’s a question of learning to trust God once again. But although I don’t understand it, I do feel that there’s consolation to be found in it. I don’t want to let go of my faith in God, because it’s the only thing that gives me hope.”

Hugo: “I’ve had moments of doubt, but I leaned on the people around me. The fiancée of one of the victims was in my fraternity and I felt that she remained very close to God. I didn’t see her getting angry. That was when I thought: Why should I be angry?”

Together on the bus

The accident was soon followed by three funerals. Or rather: two funerals and one memorial service, since one of the bodies had not yet been found. It was only after the Alp snow melted that an avalanche dog found Mark’s body, on 19 March. Tessa and Kevin attended all three services. The University organised a bus to drive them to the second funeral. “This may sound



crazy, but it was kind of cosy,” says Tessa. “To be together on that bus.”

Kevin: “Well, we saw a lot of each other that month.”

Friendships deepen when you go through something traumatic. And all three believe this to be a permanent effect.

Hugo: “As a first-year member I wasn’t yet very serious about the association, but an event like this really stops you in your tracks. It creates connections with people you might otherwise not have had.”

Kevin was afraid that first-year members wouldn’t be able to enjoy the kind of carefree first year he’d had. Alongside his sadness about the death of Marcel, Mark and Timo he also found this thought very painful. Hugo reassures him: it all turned out fine. “I definitely had a different first year than those who came before me, but not necessarily a worse one. I’ve seen the association at its closest, and I got real friendships in return.”

Some NSN members sought professional help to deal with their sadness, others suffered some delay in their studies. Exactly six months after the avalanche the board hung up a plaque with the name of the victims in the boardroom. On 7 March 2018 a memorial service was held in the Boskapel: students once again took the time to remember the friends they had lost. This was probably the last ‘official’ moment organised by the board. Life goes on, members graduate, and in September a new generation of students will be welcomed. “And that’s a good thing,” says Tessa.

Did the accident affect you personally?

Kevin: “It robbed me of my carefree attitude. I’m more aware of everything I do or say, as if everything is more meaningful now. At the time it could be very confusing. Now I would say: it made my life – and my faith – more real. But it took a while for normal pleasure to return.”

Hugo: “Yes, that’s it. It’s the end of a carefree existence.”

Tessa: “In the beginning I was a little anxious. It was so random: three healthy boys, and then just like that... It was the randomness of it being an avalanche. It meant anything could happen. When my boyfriend went out, I’d think: ‘I have to say good-bye properly’. But at some point I was able to let it go again.”

Kevin: “I still have that. When I spend the weekend with my parents or with friends, I take the time to say good-bye more consciously.”

Kevin: “Ik heb dat nog steeds wel. Als ik in het weekend bij mijn ouders of met vrienden ben geweest, neem ik bewuster afscheid.” *

'WE'RE DROPPING AWAY FROM THE WORLD TOP'



Bert van der Zwaan quotes make good newspaper headings. 'More selection at the gate', 'We have too many students', 'Where's our Harvard in the polder?' But these statements often mask a nuanced argument, claims the former Rector of Utrecht University.

Text: Mathijs Noij en Linda van der Pol / **Photographs:** Bert Beelen

As he leads the interviewers to the walled garden of the Utrecht Faculty Club, Bert van der Zwaan stops to shake a number of hands. Acquaintances ask how he's been since resigning after eight years as Rector of Utrecht University last March. For example Thom de Graaf, Chair of the Vereniging Hogescholen (Association

for Universities of Applied Sciences) – who happens to also have an appointment in the Academy Building, “the beating heart of the University”, on the Domplein.

Van der Zwaan has just returned from a family holiday in Andalusia and in the brief friendly chats with his former colleagues he confesses almost guiltily to spending a lot of time in the garden. People respond that it sounds wonderful, and isn't that what retirement is all about? You can't keep on going forever.

Not that Van der Zwaan is standing still: he's currently writing two books – one on research and one on the future of the university.

Once upon a time, Van der Zwaan was Professor of Biogeology in Nijmegen. After leaving for Utrecht in 2003, he soon landed himself an administrative position. First as Dean, then in 2011 as Rector. What he missed most during those years was fieldwork. And this is what he's picked up again, this time together with his wife Wilma Wessels. Wilma is a palaeontologist, but while Van der Zwaan, as a marine geology specialist, opted for destinations around the Mediterranean and the oceans, rodent-expert Wessels mostly worked in countries like Russia, Mongolia and Turkey. This month they are going to the Balkans together, to do research, and in Van der Zwaan's case, also some climbing. A hobby he took up on this first fieldwork trip as a student: “It took me five days to reach Spain with my Renault 4. It wouldn't go faster than 80 kilometres an hour, with ditch water in the radiator.”

Under Van der Zwaan, Utrecht University was headed by a researcher unafraid to voice his own opinions. Following interviews about his book *Haalt de universiteit 2040? (Will the university live to see 2040?)* (2016), national press journalists avidly listened to his claims to the effect that the Netherlands had too many university students, that universities should select more stringently at the gate, and that the Netherlands would do well to develop one university into a top institution – a kind of ‘Harvard in the polder’. It's pretty obvious that statements like these would cause minor earthquakes in the Netherlands, with its egalitarian education system.

You argue for a differentiated academic landscape in the Netherlands. In what way?

“In every way, actually: I would like universities to distin-

guish themselves in terms of their signature, size, and status. The Dutch education system is completely egalitarian. If one university gets government funding, all the others have to follow suit. Don't get me wrong: anyone who says Dutch education is bad should look again. In the 1970s, that's when it was bad. But as things stand we are slowly dropping away from the world top, and I see this as a serious threat.

It's not feasible with our current budget to have all our universities reach the top. It would be better to differentiate the function of universities: you could for instance distinguish between teaching and research universities. Everyone thinks that Utrecht University is out to become a top university – which is true, by the way – but I believe differentiation will help the entire Dutch educational system to function better.”

Are these teaching and research universities meant to be serving different kinds of students?

“It's a fact that many students end up in the wrong place and can't make the most of their talents. Excellence programmes like the Honours Academy in Nijmegen are symptomatic of this: these students are not challenged enough by a regular university degree. This kind of programme shouldn't be necessary – there should be a university for these students.”

You're a proponent of selection.

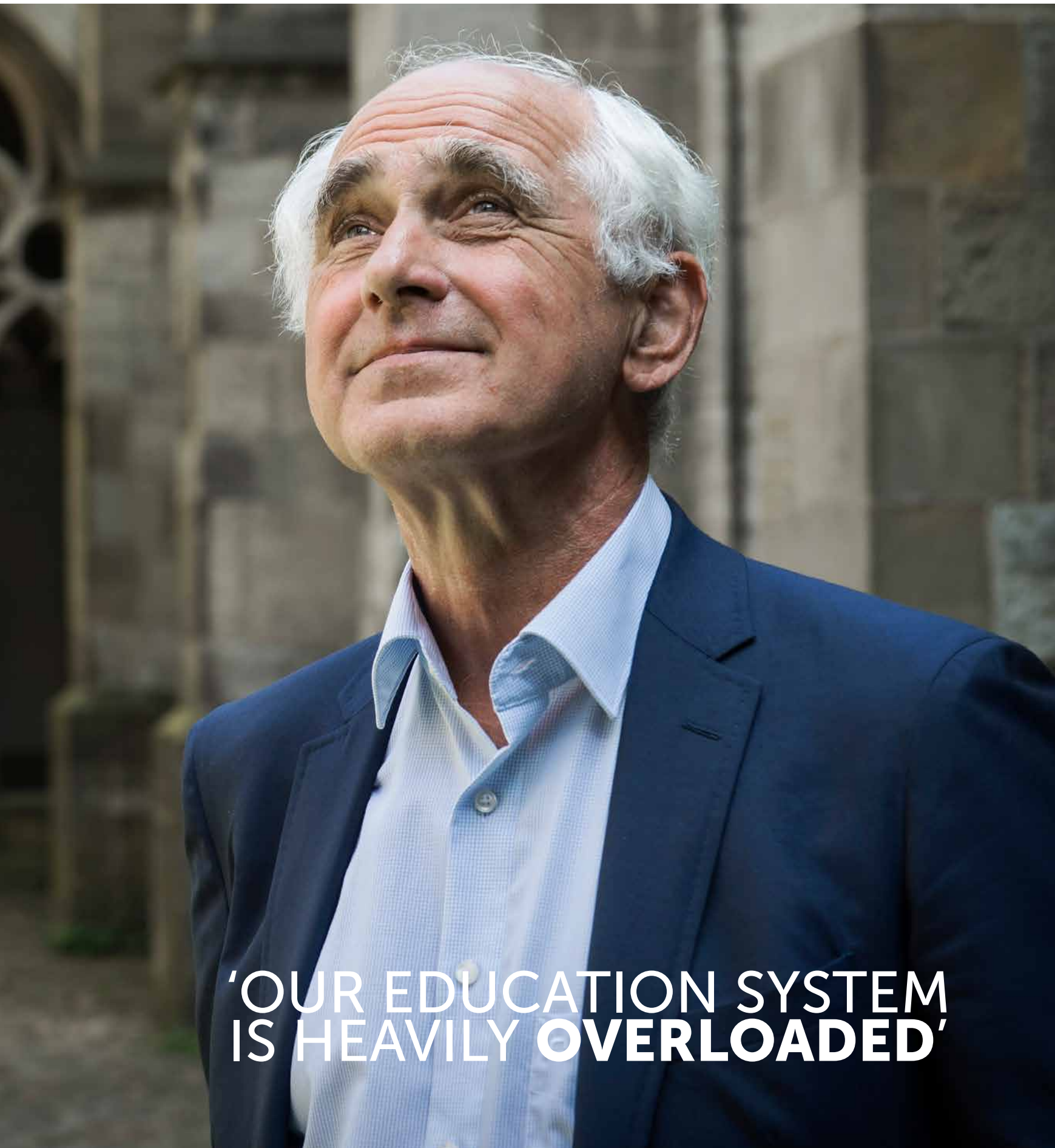
“The media often quote me saying that I'm all for selection. This isn't quite true. My theory is actually quite different. Student numbers have grown much too fast in recent years, while government funding per student has declined. Our educational system is under too much pressure. At this rate, we'll soon see academic quality drop. I see two solutions. The best one is to give universities more money. But I don't see that happening anytime soon. If they don't get more money, then selection might be a good option – because it helps to regulate student inflow, so students end up in the right place.

Selection is also unavoidable to maintain a balance between Dutch and international students. I'm very much in favour of quality – I want to attract the top students, but the international classroom has to be really diverse. A Dutch study programme with 90% of students coming from China is something I find hard to swallow.”

The fear of Nijmegen Rector Han van Krieken is that selection will exclude certain social groups, for example students from disadvantaged families. What would you say to him?

“That he should take a good look around and see that we can't go on like this: our system is completely overloaded. We're actually on the same page, except I'm not afraid of selection. It could have a very positive effect.

In Utrecht, even without selection we're getting too few disadvantaged students. We see that obstacles are not



**'OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM
IS HEAVILY OVERLOADED'**

'IT WOULD BE A LOGICAL STEP FOR NIJMEGEN TO COLLABORATE WITH UTRECHT AND EINDHOVEN'

based on intellectual abilities, but on social context. At the University, we have lots of people who don't feel at home intellectually, but they're being pushed by their parents, and have the money to afford exam training programmes and remedial teaching. Many social groups – refugees, people from disadvantaged families – do have the intellectual capacity, but end up being excluded.

Together with my wife I created a fund for refugees and other disadvantaged groups. With this money, language courses can be offered in districts like Overvecht and Kanaleneiland: many people there have poor language skills, so they will never make it through the selection procedure for a programme like Law, which is very language-oriented."

Van der Zwaan grew up in Voorschoten, where his father worked his way to the top in a silver factory. A very confessional environment, an ARP (Anti-Revolutionary Party) family – not street-poor, but certainly not rich. Van der Zwaan was the first child to study, encouraged by his parents. He was good at languages and was told to focus on the humanities, but after reading Darwin, there was no going back. "I was seventeen, and I enrolled at the VU University Amsterdam, home to the most modern geology faculty of the time. Amsterdam was a bit the Sodom and Gomorrah of the Netherlands in those days: there was so much going on, including the occupation of the Maagdenhuis." After graduating – in less than six years, a unique feat in those days – he went to Israel to pick bananas in a kibbutz. It was during this year that he realised what he really wanted to do was to become a researcher.

Were you an ideal student? You completed your studies in record time, particularly for that period, and you got a perfect mark (10) for your final examination in Dutch language and literature.

"Well ... Looking back, I could have learned much more

from my student days. I had to have a job to pay for my studies, and I was much too pragmatic: I aimed for seven or higher, but never strove for perfection.

I was a typical student from a disadvantaged background. In the 1970s the university was a much more elitist environment than now, and there were relatively few students. My parents were on the lower end of the average income. This made me pretty insecure, and the professors did nothing to boost my self-confidence. They just threw a book at me and told me to figure it out. What I missed was the opportunity to enjoy doing research with confidence.

University students should be driven by curiosity and not the fear of getting it wrong. I find it problematic when students don't have an opinion, or when they ask: 'So, what's the right answer?'"

Students nowadays suffer from stress and loneliness. As a former Rector, does this worry you?

"There's no real evidence that the reason is study-related. Students are fairly representative of young people in general. So I think we have to look at this problem from a much broader perspective. Young people these days have busy agendas with jobs, lots of ambition, and social obligations from here to Tokyo. The fear of social media leads to a kind of impoverishment. The progressive digitalisation of education, with physical campuses losing their importance, only reinforces this problem. I believe my role as Rector was to take a very clear stance on this. To stimulate the debate in order to formulate a collective norm awareness. It is also the university's role to make young people better citizens."

From 1991 until 2003 you were Professor at Radboud University. Before that you worked as a lecturer at Utrecht University, where you returned after leaving Nijmegen. Do you see major differences between the two universities?



“I couldn’t believe my ears when I first came to Nijmegen. In Utrecht, colleagues and students were always loudly complaining about everything. In Nijmegen, where I was appointed Professor at a very young age, there was an incredibly pleasant and friendly atmosphere. There was an annual professors’ dinner and my colleagues were almost un-Utrecht like in their collegiality. The world I was coming from was much more abrasive.”

Does Nijmegen lack a certain critical attitude?

“You might indeed ask yourself that. Things have evened out in the meantime, but there was a difference. A middle ground between Utrecht – too critical, lots of complaining – and Nijmegen, at times too friendly, would be ideal.”

Imagine you had been appointed Rector in Nijmegen.

What would you have focused on?

“At the time, in 2000, my close colleague Kees Blom (Professor of Ecology, eds.) was appointed Rector. In those days Radboud University was a much smaller, more regional university, which was something Kees and I used to discuss before our appointments. There was less quality assurance, the appointment policy for professors was at times questionable – the Roman Catholic background still played an important role in this context. Such practices are unthinkable in the international field. Blom tackled this, and the audit committees that were introduced across the Netherlands in the 1990s also greatly improved quality. Yes, these steps really helped Radboud grow.”

“In terms of administration, I see that faculties in Nijmegen often just do their own thing. Utrecht is much more centrally organised, with sharper business processes. Look, of course, as long as consensus is possible, you should go for it. It’s incredibly important to have a base



BIO
**BERT VAN DER
ZWAAN**

Born
in Voorschoten (1952)
Studied

Geology at the VU
University Amsterdam
and obtained his degree
and PhD at Utrecht
University. Worked as a
Professor in Nijmegen
from 1991 until 2003

of support within your university, but sometimes you just have to make decisions.”

In *Haalt de universiteit 2040?* (*Will the university live to see 2040?*) Van der Zwaan argues that although we live in a highly digitised society, geography and regionalisation play an ever-increasing role in the education system. He speaks of the importance of knowledge hubs, metropolitan regions where universities work closely together to collectively improve the quality of what they offer. Van der Zwaan predicts that London will become the most important European knowledge hub (“even though we’ll have to wait and see what happens after Brexit”). The Randstad region could grow into the second European hub, possibly in collaboration with the Flemish universities.

Haalt de universiteit 2040? doesn’t mention Radboud University at all. Does Nijmegen have to ‘join in or perish’?

“The jury is still out on that. It’s not too late for Nijmegen, but I see a regional collaboration arising on a smaller scale between universities in Zuid-Holland (Leiden, Rotterdam and Delft), between the two Amsterdam universities, and between Utrecht, Eindhoven and Wageningen. These three blocks make up the Randstad hub. It would make sense for Nijmegen to collaborate with the Utrecht and Eindhoven region – to create a triangle. But this requires a lot of effort, and it’s difficult to bridge the physical distance. Nijmegen could also look in the other direction: towards Twente and Munster.”

Geographically, Nijmegen falls outside the Randstad region, and therefore outside the knowledge hub. In this sense, your plea for a differentiated system sounds like a threat to Radboud University: Is our only option to be ‘just’ a teaching university?

“This development poses a potential threat to all universities, including Nijmegen. One solution is for universities to complement each other. One focuses on one specialisation, the other on another. Utrecht University and Radboud University are already largely complementary: our science faculties and humanities faculties are very different. This kind of complementarity could form the basis for collaboration. But it’s difficult – Dutch universities haven’t taken many steps in this direction yet.

Look, we can’t keep on going like we are now. The question is whether the Netherlands can afford to keep thirteen broad universities without a single one of them being in the world top 10. The university is a brilliant environment, which still offers a great deal of freedom. And research is all about hard work, blood, sweat and tears.

But I’m also saying: the ever-expanding university, with less and less money per student and therefore increased work pressure on the staff, will collapse one day – we can’t keep demanding more from our researchers.” *



'ONE ARM ALONE TAKES THREE MONTHS'

Lucas Boer (30) was once told to become a carpenter or an electrician. He's now curator at the Museum of Anatomy and Pathology, and is working on his PhD. People haven't always understood his fascination for dead things.

Text: Annemarie Haverkamp / **Photography:** Duncan de Fey



Even at primary school I used to love to sit in the bushes and dissect dead birds. We once went on an excursion to the petting zoo, and the teachers discovered I'd brought a pocket knife with me. It was a huge drama – my parents were called in, the works. But I'd simply brought that pocket knife along because I thought I might find owl pellets to dissect. I ran into a lot of resistance to my interest in dead things. Of course, it's easier to under-

stand your child being crazy about football. Apparently I didn't fit in the neat categories and so they advised me to attend a 'vocational college', to become a carpenter or an electrician. My mother didn't allow this to happen, luckily, so I went to the MAVO school in Oss instead.

I must have been about thirteen years old when I brought a dead cat home in my backpack. I'd found it in a meadow, and it was still fresh. My parents weren't particularly pleased about this, but I was raised with lots of freedom, so they didn't stop me. I dissected the cat and boiled it. It works just like with a chicken: if you boil it for



'SOME CHILDREN ARE FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OLD'

will people be willing to look at it, which can lead them to new insights.

When you think about it, I'm still doing the same thing, but now with people. After the MAVO, I went on to secondary laboratory education, which most closely matched my interest in biology and nature. Then I completed my higher laboratory education. In my final year I wrote a letter to the Radboudumc Museum of Anatomy and Pathology: 'Can I work for you?' I sent in photographs of my skeletons and was immediately hired as a taxidermist. On my first day, I was invited to sit in on a course to teach medical students how to make preparations from bodies. 'This will be your first experience of cutting a human body,' said the curator. For me, there was little difference. I saw it as just another body, not a human body. In my mind, I'd immediately made it into an object. A body was a person once, but that person's spirit is no longer there. I really see it as separate from a living person with their unique personality and experiences. I have to. Otherwise I couldn't do this kind of work. For that course, I had to make a preparation of a woman's inguinal canal. I won the prize for the 'most attractive preparation'.

Tiny scissors

The Anatomy Museum serves an educational purpose. Students come here to study how the human body is structured, and where things can go wrong. We also teach dissection courses, using bodies that were donated to science. Every year, the anatomy department receives one hundred bodies or so. I only prepare body parts to be exhibited in the museum, to add to our collection. We never make anything just for fun, only if there is an educational need for it. But we do display our preparations in a way that makes them interesting for regular museum visitors. I'm never completely satisfied with a preparation. A beautiful preparation is much harder to make than a beautiful skeleton. One arm takes up to three months to complete. You have to remove every single membrane, because any debris will end up swimming in the formalin, which distracts from the preparation. Any loose edge makes it look gross. We use tiny scissors and knives to get it to look perfect.

long enough, it falls apart all by itself. You're left with a puzzle of loose bones. This is how I taught myself to skeletonise, even though I had no clue at the time that this was the way to clean a skeleton perfectly. Now I've skeletonised more than one hundred animals: birds, lions, seals, and many more. They usually come from zoos or private individuals, and in most cases I return them to their owners in skeletonised form. A natural posture is very important: it has to look as if they simply ran away. What I'm interested in is creating something out of a dead animal that will fascinate the viewer. Only then

I'm always looking for a challenge. Three years ago I was appointed Curator of the Museum, and next year I hope to complete my PhD. It's difficult as a non-academic. Someone has to be willing to give you a break. I was lucky that Professor Dirk Ruiter saw my potential and gave me this opportunity at Radboudumc. Dirk is now my thesis supervisor. For my research, I'm mapping the Dutch teratological collections. The Greek word τέρας (teras) means wonder or monster, it has a double but also a negative connotation. It's used to refer to children with congenital disorders. They're preserved in formaldehyde at various anatomy museums. The odd thing is that remarkably few people do anything with them. These children were collected a long time ago because some physician found them so unique he wanted to keep them. Often they're no more than a kind of rarities cabinet. People look at them with horror, or snicker

'MY WORK HAS HELPED ME BECOME AWARE THAT MY LIFE COULD BE OVER ANY MOMENT'

about them uneasily. I saw these kinds of reactions in our museum too, and I felt terrible about it. Our collection consists of 72 children, collected between 1950 and 1980. You have to understand that these were completely different times: these children were born dead or died immediately after birth and were usually quickly taken away from their mothers. There was a taboo about it. It's not even clear whether all the parents gave permission for them to be used in the museum – nowadays this wouldn't be possible. And yet, we decided to exhibit the children. Such severely malformed babies are rarely born these days, thanks to our much-improved prenatal screening techniques. The medical value of this kind of collection is priceless. Only in these old collections can you see what a congenital disorder actually looks like,





COLUMN

Lucy's law

Lucienne van der Geld is lecturer in Notarial Law and Legal Director of the Notary Network

Social

On YouTube, you can watch Heleen studying on her *Study with me* channel. In the top left corner of the screen there's a timer. She turns a page, breaking the silence. On the desk in front of Heleen is a box of red grapes in a supermarket container (500 gram). According to the timer, she's got another 32 minutes to go. Will she have enough time to eat the grapes? She's making lots of notes. In front of her is a row of her favourite fourteen pens, in various colours. Apparently some of Heleen's study sessions last a really long time. It seems these kinds of videos have a stimulating effect on other students. They put Heleen 'on' when they sit down to study, so as not to feel like they're studying on their own. I sure hope they're less easily distracted than I am.... Incidentally, Heleen is not the only online study buddy available. YouTube is full of 'study with me' channels. Some live, others not.

I understand the phenomenon, but then again I don't. If you have to cram for an exam in the middle of the night, it's nice to know you're not alone. But during the day, you could also just go to the University Library. It's full of hundreds of Heleens, all working as hard as you. So why follow Heleen on YouTube?

Maybe it's a bit like watching lectures online. Another thing I don't quite get (if you're a full-time student, that is). If you've got a bad-hair day, you can skip a lecture and catch up on it online. But not every day is a bad-hair day, surely? (Otherwise, you might consider switching hairdressers). And what about the need to snack in class? I haven't yet witnessed anything as extreme as the student eating cheese blocks that recently went viral, but one student in my class had no compunction whatsoever about munching on a red pepper at 9 a.m.

Maybe it's my Brabant blood: I see everything as a social event, I seek contact, and I enjoy talking to other people. Just go to the lectures, study at the University Library, and you'll see that you're not alone in your studies. Nothing new then on YouTube: it's all right here already – come to the Campus and you'll see! And you're paying for it. Whether you show up or not.

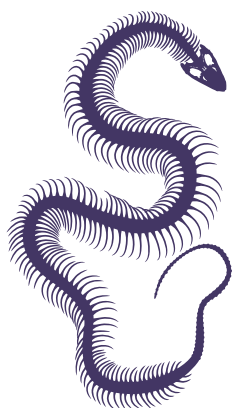
especially at an advanced stage. When the museum celebrated its 50th anniversary in October, we organised an exhibition around this collection. We picked out the 35 most interesting preparations and placed them in new containers, replacing the old formalin. For most of these children, we don't even know their name, or what year they were born in. By displaying them in an attractive way, I hope to give them back some dignity. All the preparations were supplied with information, to make it less scary for visitors. I invite medical students and young physicians to look at the children in the museum and name what they see. What diagnosis would they make? Then I show them MRI scans. These often reveal much more still.

Siamese twins

For my PhD research I'm trying to map as many children as possible from the Dutch teratological collections. Unfortunately, we can't scan all the preparations, because some museums are very attached to the original containers and labels. In such cases, you can't say: 'I'll just take the preparation out for a minute.' Some are four hundred years old. What I hope is that with thorough research, including the study of new scans, we'll be able to identify patterns. That we'll discover where a disorder originates. For this you really have to go back to the embryo phase. We're currently studying Siamese twins. There's a theory about their origin that is simply repeated from generation to generation. I happen to have a different theory, and I'm trying to articulate my vision by involving experts from other fields, like experimental development biology. Launching new ideas, asking questions, that's what it's all about. And then hoping for new insights.

I recently heard someone use the word 'morbid' in reference to my research. For me it's not like that at all. Anatomy is relatively simple: there are differences between people, but most bodies are built in the same way. Congenital disorders are elusive, and I'm fascinated by the complexity of the issues. How is such and such possible? My girlfriend is a doctor, and over dinner at night we discuss what we've seen that day. She wants to become a clinical geneticist, so we're basically in the same field.

I'm not afraid of death, but my work has helped me become aware that my life could be over any moment. A person dies, and 24 hours later their body is lying in the anatomy department. I think of death as the end. The flame goes out, and that's it. Sometimes I'm alone in the dissecting room, surrounded by bodies – some of them quite recently deceased. If there was something beyond death, I'd have noticed by now, don't you think?" *



BIO LUCAS BOER

Born
in Oss (1988)

Study
secondary vocational
laboratory educa-
tion, higher vocational
laboratory educa-
tion, and currently
PhD candidate in
Pathological Anatomy



idee. gezicht
C phel
fabri



CHARLOTTE BLAAK IS AN ANTI-FEMINIST

Charlotte Blaak doesn't believe in quotas for women and she opposes the use of the word oppression. VOX staff member and feminist Jozien Wijkhuis speaks to the Philosophy student. 'Why do you wear a T-shirt that says *Feminism is Cancer?*'

Text: Jozien Wijkhuis / Photography: Erik van 't Hullenaar

I'm surprised to discover, a few minutes into our conversation, that Charlotte Blaak (21) and I already agree on something, namely that 'feminism is hip'.

But while I see this as a positive development, immerse myself in activist Netflix series and listen to a feminist podcast on my way to Blaak's student flat in Arnhem, her perspective on this trend is very different. The young Philosophy student happens to be an anti-feminist.

Within a short period of time I've encountered Blaak twice in the national media. The first time in a minor role in an article about her boyfriend Jesper Jansen, another anti-feminist, in *Volkskrant Magazine*, where Charlotte's hands were shown on the photograph, pulling his suspenders straight. The photograph was accompanied by the revealing headline 'The angry white man wants his manliness back' and the article ended with the quote 'My girlfriend can't wait to make packed lunches for our children and drive them to football practice.' She later appeared in the *Trollen, Trump en Thierry* (Trolls, Trump and Thierry) documentary broadcast by the current affairs programme *Tegenlicht*.

She thought the latter was well made, she says, as she sits with a cup of coffee at the foot of her bed. "Even though they cut out a lot, what was left was good." She's less happy with the *Volkskrant Magazine* article. "It's not really that I won't be active outside the home," she says, slightly on her guard. "I'd be bored to death. I want to work a few days a week, but mostly I want to make myself useful at home. And I want lots of children."

In *Trollen, Trump en Thierry* Blaak smiles into the camera. 'Lavender Children' it says at the bottom of the screen, the name of the political meme Facebook group that Blaak manages with others. Lavender, yes, in reference to the pot-pourri sachet Thierry Baudet is shown smelling with so much delight in an infamous VPRO video. In the documentary, Blaak sits between her also broadly smiling boyfriend Jesper and another friend, Samuel. They talk about left-wing people, 'linkie-winkies', and argue that people 'on the right' have more material for jokes. "I think it's funny that we were asked to take part in this documentary. Lavender Children doesn't even have two hundred members. It's insignificant. But I do have something to say and I want people to hear it."

The article was about the young white man's crisis, the documentary about internet trolls, memes and the rise of the right wing. How did you end up appearing in both?

"The *Tegenlicht* documentary shows that most people on the right of the political spectrum don't spend much time thinking about whether they've offended someone. I think that's because as right-wingers we're not much into victim thinking. There isn't this idea of a class struggle with the victims, so we drag everyone through the same wringer. That's the meme aspect. Being critical of feminism is part of it. By the way, where did you see that I call myself an anti-feminist?"

On Facebook. You wrote 'for an anti-feminist I quite often wear dungarees.'

She laughs: "Oh, I might have written that, yeah."

So you don't mind me calling you that?

"No. The term anti-feminist pretty much covers it. It's just that I wouldn't call myself that in a conversation because I don't want to sound like an activist. I find activism irritating."


And there you are, opposite someone who identifies themselves as an activist feminist.

What's your issue with feminism exactly?

"For me it's mostly about class thinking. According to feminists, you have the oppressing class, men, and the oppressed class, women. I don't agree with this word, 'oppression'. The feminist perspective is that men are perpetrators, and women are victims. And I don't think that's right. I also find this striking in the #metoo discussion. If a woman says 'this man did such and such to me', we always believe her. Even though this is not how it's supposed to be in the legal system. On the other hand, when someone like Jelle Brandt Cortius makes a similar claim, we suddenly take a much more nuanced view, saying that 'maybe it isn't true, and surely there's another side to the story.' Why wouldn't this be true of women too? Can a woman not lie about being attacked or raped? Throughout history you do see a lot of inequality between men and women, but I think there are better ways of explaining it than 'it was because men wanted to oppress women'."

How would you explain it then?

"I'll give you an example: next year we're celebrating 100 years of voting rights for women. Big celebration, great, super cool. But back in



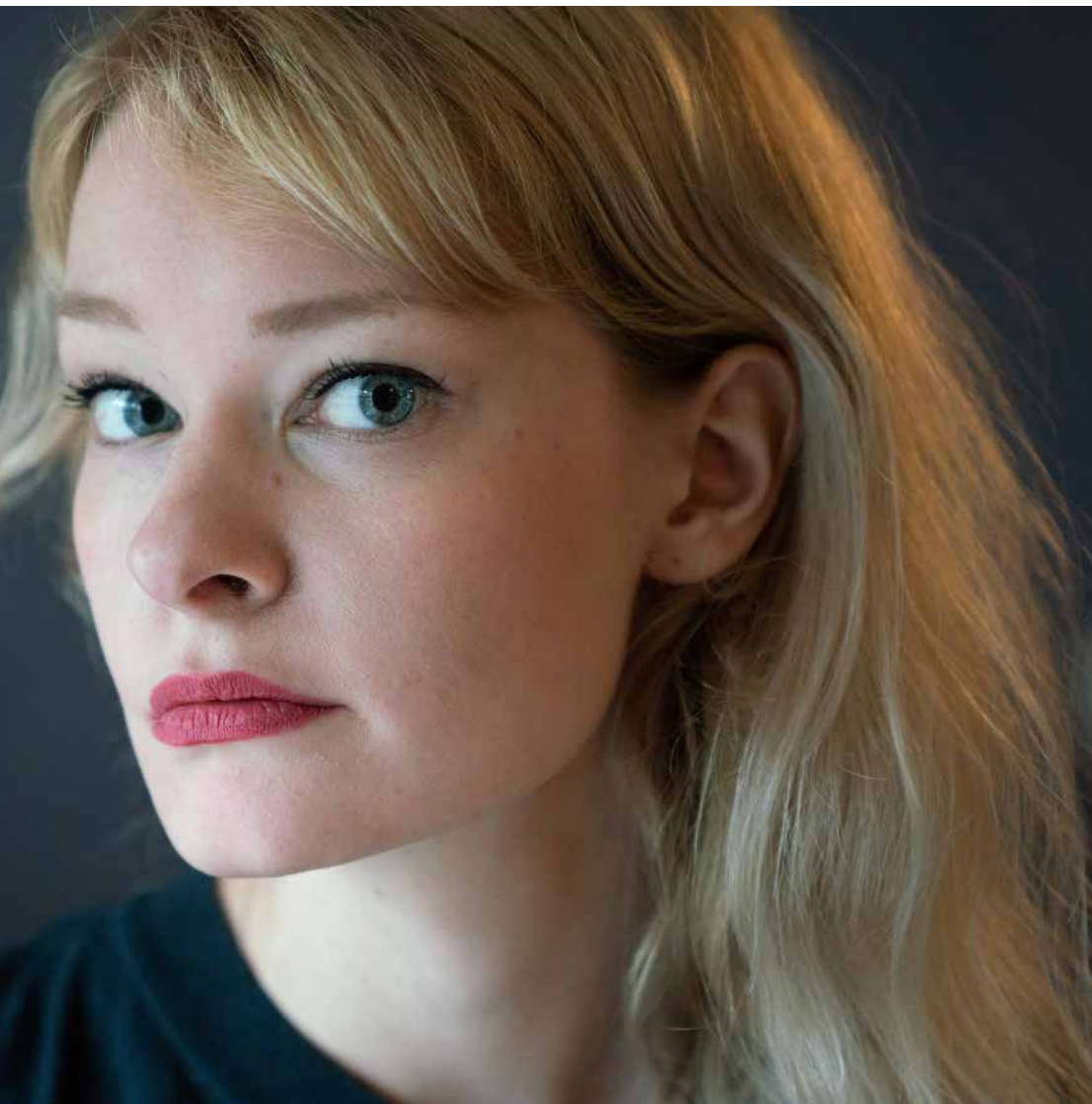
'IT'S LOGICAL FOR MEN TO WORK MORE THAN WOMEN'

2017, nobody celebrated 100 years of voting rights for men."

General voting rights, you mean. But politics was also dominated by men before then?

"Yes, but not just because they were men. We're talking about 1917 and 1919, a time when Europe was full of political tensions and threats of war. Politics was mostly about the question: 'in which trench would you like to die?' Since it was mostly men who did the dying in trenches, I think it makes sense that men should be allowed to decide about it. I also think society has fewer issues with using men as cannon fodder than women. As a society, we're gynocentric."

In the fourth year of Blaak's secondary education, a teacher said that it was unfair that men often occupied much higher positions at work than women. This was the first time Blaak found herself rebelling. "My first reaction was 'but if you're good, then that's where you'll



end up, no?’ I’d heard the idea that there was ‘an unfairly large number of men at the top’ before, but from that moment on I knew: I feel differently about this than other people. I generally prefer ideas that aren’t very popular. Maybe it’s an adolescent thing, or a question of personality, I don’t know.”

How do you know that your ideas are not so popular?

“I really enjoy debating for the sake of debating. I just say random things to see what happens, and then people get angry, which is how I test people’s opinions. The idea of the number of men at the top being fair was also something I was just trying out for size. But then I thought: actually, it’s kind of true. So I got stuck there.”

On Facebook, you try out a lot of controversial ideas for size. As you sit here opposite me, I see a moderate woman whom I have no trouble relating to. Beforehand, I wasn’t so sure. On a

picture on Facebook, you’re wearing a T-shirt with the text Feminism is Cancer. Why wear a T-shirt like that?

“I find these kinds of statements interesting because they provoke a reaction. It’s generally meant to be funny, stimulating, and even a bit painful. The responses I get tell me how much value people attach to terms like feminism. I’m kicking against something, so apparently there’s a sacred cow here.”

But you wouldn’t wear the T-shirt if you disagreed with the statement, would you?

“No, I don’t disagree with it, but I wouldn’t say it in a conversation if I’m trying to get somewhere. This may be the difference between me in real life and me on the Internet. On the Internet I’m not looking for a dialogue, but in real life I am. I want to hear what the other person has to say, where their opinions differ from mine.”

When you write on Facebook ‘a man earns money, a woman creates value. It’s that simple’, how much truth is there in that?

“That post was based on the idea that a man earns a lot of money, and a woman transforms into food and a home, and care for the children. I think this is basically true. I find it quite logical that a man works more than a woman. These days you can no longer expect a woman not to work at all, it’s not affordable, and I think women would be incredibly bored. But I don’t find it a strange idea that the man should work more. Women suffer less from working less.”

Why do you think that is?

“I think it’s due to womb envy. Women can always create, they can give birth to a child. Men have to prove themselves in different ways. That’s why they have more drive to work for society, a business, their family, etc.”

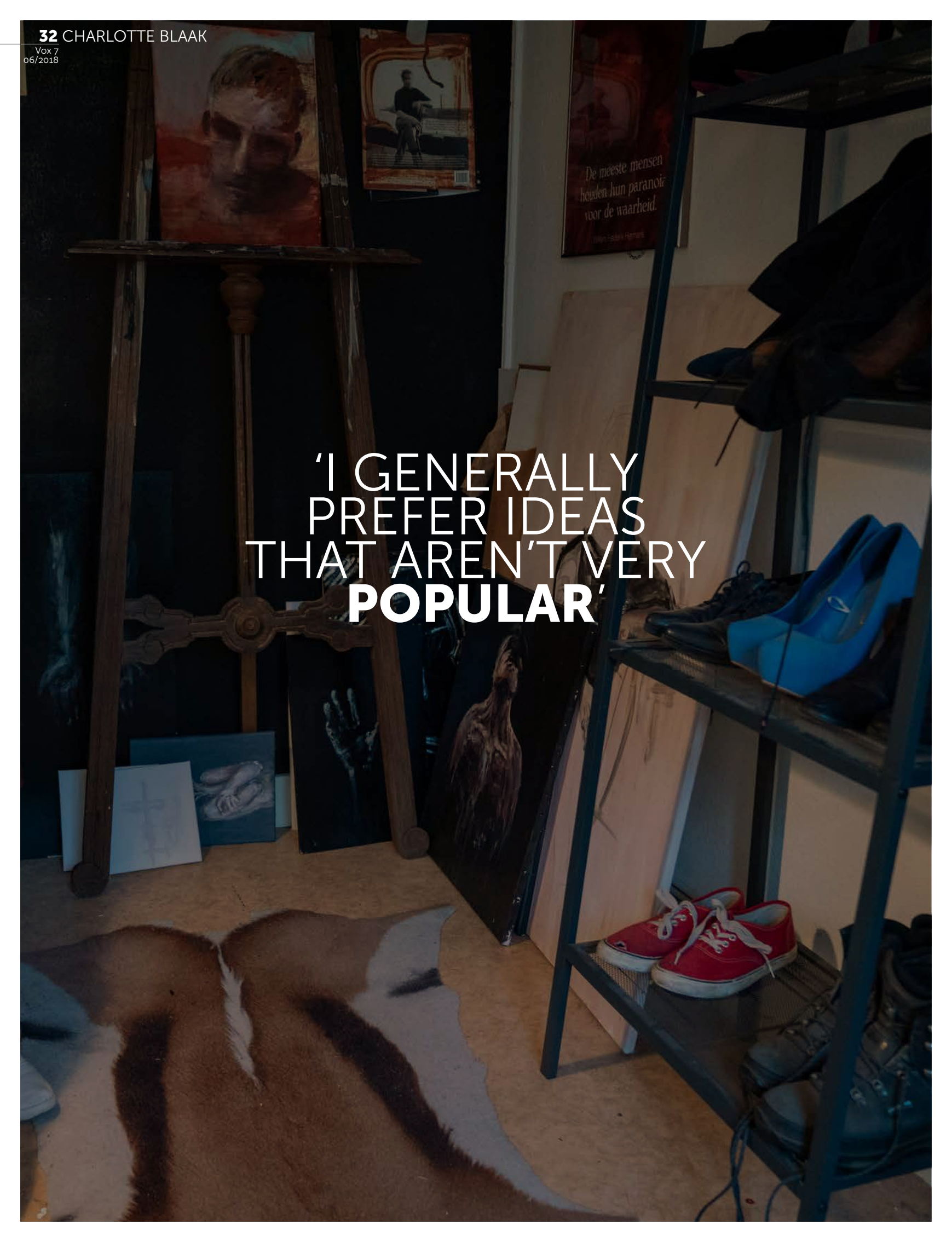
There’s a knock on the door, and boyfriend Jesper walks in. “Just checking that you’re not saying anything incriminating about me,” he jokes, “because that’s who we are as a couple, aren’t we?” Once Jesper returns to his own room, Blaak explains that recently at Radboud University, a girl threw a beer into his face, for no reason. “I thought it was funny how she then hid behind her boyfriend’s back. I rarely get such strong responses in real life. Maybe because I’m a girl.”

She was once listed on a racist wall of shame on the Internet, for sharing a picture of a concentration camp with the caption ‘it didn’t start with camps, but with hate and intolerance.’ “I added ‘when you say ‘hate and intolerance’, do you mean Islam-motivated anti-Semitism and homophobia?’ Apparently, this made me a racist. But I was talking about religion, not race. Of course, I’m not happy to appear on a racist wall of shame. Potential employers will see it too.”

When she publishes a strongly anti-feminist post, she sometimes has to get over her own aversion. “It’s quite nice to believe that ‘I’m a woman, so I’m a victim, and disadvantaged’. It makes anything you achieve much more valuable. But maybe it’s not true, and it really is down to our own achievements. This puts more pressure on us.”

But according to this theory it would mean that the absence of women at the top, for example of the university, is simply due to women delivering lesser quality.

“Yes. I often think that’s true.”



'I GENERALLY
PREFER IDEAS
THAT AREN'T VERY
POPULAR'

Radboud University has all kinds of programmes to help women reach the top. Professor Marieke van den Brink recently said in VOX that this low quota is due to unconscious prejudice. You don't believe in this?

"Radboud University states in its selection policy: 'if we have two candidates of equal value - we will choose the woman'. Because of diversity. But that means it's not about quality, only about what you're hiding in your pants. It seems to me to be a strange criterion."

Just to be clear: you believe that in a group of one hundred men, there are more suitable candidates for a university Chair than in a group of one hundred women?

"Yes."

Why?

"Because I think men are prepared to go further. Because of their need to prove themselves, their drive. Men don't suffer so much from ninety-hour working weeks, while women are quicker to develop burn-out symptoms. I simply think men are better suited for it. That doesn't mean that men are by definition more intelligent, or that they work harder, but that men are more likely to have the qualities required for a top position."

In your opinion, what would the ideal university board look like?

"I don't think there's anything wrong with a predominantly male board, nor do I have a problem with women board members. But I don't believe in quotas. I think everyone will get the position he or she deserves."



BIO CHARLOTTE BLAAK

Born
in Borne, 1996

Study
Philosophy,
since 2016

In other words, women have to 'work harder'?
"Yes. Or maybe work differently."

What do you mean?

"Women intuitively feel that they work longer days than men, because women have more trouble letting go of 'the home situation'. There's more emotional involvement, so it's not strange if a man and a woman work an equal number of hours at the office, that the woman will tire more easily. Simply because they have a different approach to working hours and work. If you're a woman who doesn't have an issue with this, great! I think you'll easily get the position you want. I don't think quotas add anything, though. If you believe that women are underrepresented because men have certain prejudices against them, you can never conclude that the system is fair in its present form."

Nijmegen is known as Havana on the Waal, Radboud University devotes a lot of energy to programmes for supporting women in academia... What's it like for you studying here?

She laughs: "What's great about left-wing voters is that they have much better bars. They're more creative and they make more music, so there are lots of great places for going out. I knew Nijmegen was a left-wing university when I enrolled here. It's just like reading *De Telegraaf*, you also take into account that it's a right-wing newspaper. I do notice that left-wing theories are more easily accepted at the University. For example when talking about the wage gap, which doesn't even exist. But it doesn't bother me much, certainly not in the Philosophy department. There you can have a good discussion with most people." *

ADVERTISEMENT

Radboud **in'to** Languages
opens up new worlds

Summer Boost Camp

ONE-DAY ENGLISH SKILLS COURSES 27, 28 AND 29 AUGUST

Pronunciation Boost | Presentation Boost | Meetings in English |
Emailing in English | The Power of Words | Storytelling | Grammar Boost

www.into.nl



24 HOURS IN GOSSE VAN DER MEER'S WHEEL

Gosse van der Meer (22) is Frisian, a top athlete, student, globetrotter and prospective cartographer. He refers to being paid for cycling as 'a good trick'. One day following in the tracks of a moustachioed cyclocross racer. 'I often listen to lectures in my hammock. What a life!'

Text: Ken Lambeets / **Photography:** Erik van 't Hullenaar

7.45 A.M.

Six months ago, Gosse van der Meer (22) exchanged a furnished anti-squat flat in Groesbeek for a spacious apartment in Kranenburg, just across the German border. I ring his doorbell just before 8 a.m. “Good morning! Have you had breakfast? Would you like some coffee?”

Gosse works his way through two sandwiches and a large bowl of buckwheat muesli, his lean muscular legs resting on a desk chair. The Frisian talks animatedly and with great enthusiasm about his youth. “By clear weather I could see the glow of the Ameland lighthouse from my bedroom window. When we were little, we played soldiers in the meadows. We threw cow dung at each other. It was so much fun!”

Little Gosse was too fanatical for team sports. He always cried when he lost. One day, his uncle gave him his old racing bicycle. “After taking part in a few races on the road, I was selected as the first junior of the club that year for the Dutch championship.”

The air-conditioning makes the air in the gym nice and cool. At this time of day, there are mostly older people around. In the background you can hear upbeat music. In the summer, Gosse trains here twice a week, in the winter three times. “As a cyclist, you train mostly your lower body, but your torso should remain in balance.”

For one hour, Gosse moves from machine to machine. He pushes weights up with his legs, rotates a heavy ball around his torso while standing on a BOSU ball, and walks through the hall ostrich-style with a heavy pillow in his neck. In between, he chats good-humouredly with the other gym visitors.

10.45 A.M.

In his slippers, Gosse paces determinedly through the Groesbeek supermarket. The Frisian throws a can of coconut milk in his shopping cart, to make his favourite dessert. “Heat up some sugar in a pan, then add highly concentrated coconut milk and banana chunks. It’s a protein bomb, but so good! I discovered it when I was racing in China.”

12.00 P.M.

Gosse quickly performs a few roll exercises, to prevent lactic acid building up in his leg muscles.

Before we eat he gives me an extensive tour of his stylish apartment. “I bring back souvenirs from every place I visit. Fewer than five items in this living-room were bought by me. This lamp and cabinet are from the thrift store, the couch and table I got from my fellow cross-cyclist Joris Nieuwenhuis. This picture of Buddha I bought in a temple on a trip across Mongolia, where I was taking part in a race. The hammock and the guitar hangers on the wall I bought myself.”

The main feature of the apartment is an old map of Europe, above the bed in his bedroom. “I patched it up myself,” laughs the prospective cartographer.

Gosse is a globetrotter. In August, he’ll run four cross races and a stage race in Australia, then he’s off for a trip across China. “Still, I’m there for the races, not on holiday. Last year I was in Mongolia: you can’t go out after 7 p.m., it’s much too dangerous. You can consider yourself lucky to get home safely.”

12.50 P.M.

Gosse sends an e-mail to his tyre sponsor with some feedback about the product. Last year, the Frisian launched his own cycling team, with himself as the only racer. This brought a lot of administration in its wake. “I can easily spend five to six hours on it a week.”

Until last year, the top athlete student rode under the auspices of the Belgian cycling team Tarteletto-Isorex. “I was the only cyclocross racer in a team focused solely on road racing. I was also the only student. They

‘YOU DON’T REALLY NEED A **MANAGER** TO SEND OUT THREE EMAILS, DO YOU?’

Gosse discovered that he liked cyclocross even better than road cycling. And that he had a talent for wallowing in the mud: “Within six or seven weeks I’d won a cross at the highest level in the Netherlands. One thing led to another, and at some point people started to pay me to cycle. What a good trick that is!”

These days Gosse is not often seen in Friesland, except when he has to swap equipment at his parents’ storage unit. “Everybody knows me in Friesland. In the winter, cyclocross races are broadcast on TV every week, and I often appear in the papers. My mother has already started on her fourth scrapbook.”

9.30 A.M.

In Gosse’s Renault Kangoo we drive to the “the greatest gym around town”. Gosse has trained in this fully equipped gym since he moved to Groesbeek.

In the car he talks about his last cross season, which basically went up in smoke. “At the World Championship in Namur, I fell in the first lap on a sharp stone. I thought there was a bit of stone in my knee, so I started digging in it, all the way into my kneecap. They had to put in seventeen stitches.”

couldn't always take this into account, which made it difficult at times. I had to give up a lot of my own opportunities to watch other people win. That's not always nice, especially if you spend an average of 25 hours a week on your bike."

Gosse took a firm decision: he would become his own boss. He manages his own equipment, puts together his own racing programme, books flights and hotels, and maintains contact with the media. "I've negotiated my start contracts myself since the early days of my career. You don't really need a manager to send out three emails, do you?"

In the cellar under his house, Gosse tweaks his equipment. A bicycle mechanic couldn't do it that fast.



As long as he can cover his fixed costs, he'll keep racing. "In the winter, I get some start and prize money. I also make a bit of money with professional crits. I couldn't win a cross race in Belgium, but in Switzerland, England or Italy, I can. The same is true of mountain bike races in Germany. I love cycling through the forest. And if I don't feel like it, I don't go."

And yet, Gosse does see himself as a competition animal. "My big goal is to win a cross race against the pros. I might be able to pull it off this winter in England, Switzerland or Luxemburg." And he doesn't allow himself to be thrown off course: "You shouldn't be too nice to your rivals. I never start a fight, but if someone starts pushing me, I push back twice as hard. That's the first thing I learned from my trainer. I like to keep things sportsmanlike, but I don't let people walk all over me. At this level, you pay the price right away."

A few weeks ago, Gosse took a cycling trip to visit all his sponsors in Italy and Switzerland. "I visited everyone to see what we're going to do this year. All my sponsors are really supportive of my career, but they also know that cyclists have few options at the end of their racing careers. That's why everyone's encouraging me to study and I even got some money to cover my tuition fees."

2.00 P.M.

Gosse scrolls through some photographs of a race he got from a photographer. He forwards to his sponsors any photograph on which they are clearly visible. Companies use these images for their catalogues. "Like this one here. You can clearly see my socks."

He himself doesn't have to be recognisable. Even his moustache doesn't have to be visible. "Oh, the moustache. The result of a bet with fellow cyclist Sieben Wouters that got out of hand: we agreed to be like Canadian ice-hockey players and not shave until the end of the season. Since I was injured before the last race, I kept the moustache. That was two years ago. I don't really care what people think of it."

2.30 P.M.

In four days' time Gosse will take part in a mountain bike race in the German Emmelshausen, close to Koblenz. In his cellar at home, he puts the final touches to his mountain bike. Within half an hour he polishes the bike, fixes the wheels, and puts on a new chain. A bicycle mechanic couldn't do it that fast. "I love my equipment. I could talk about it for hours."

3.15 P.M.

On the couch we watch a bit of the Giro. Gosse admits he hasn't seen more than half an hour of the race yet. "Actually, I'm not really into cycling races. At the presentation of my former sponsor in Belgium, everyone was

gravitating around this one man. I thought he was a famous singer, the Belgian Gordan or Gerard Joling, maybe. When I discreetly asked who he was, the atmosphere changed immediately. He turned out to be former cycling champion Johan Museeuw. In Flanders, everyone knows his list of wins by heart. To me, he's not more special than anyone else."

4.00 P.M.

Time for a short training ride. We make a double loop of fifty kilometres through the Reichswald towards Kleve. For Gosse this is just a warming up exercise, but I have trouble keeping up. Luckily I can tuck in close behind the wheel of the super fit racer.

"I often train in Germany because there's less traffic on cycle paths," he explains. "And lunch is cheap. I usually train alone: five to six hours of steady cycling. It's fantastic. As I cycle, I look around."

The sun is already low in the sky by the time Kranenburg comes into view. We cycle for a while on the Dutch-German border. On our right lies the Reichswald, on our left the sprawling, rolling fields. "During World War II, a big offensive took place here," explains my guide. "I often go mountain biking through the forest. Last winter, after a big storm, I found a fence. Underneath it was a German bunker. How cool is that!"

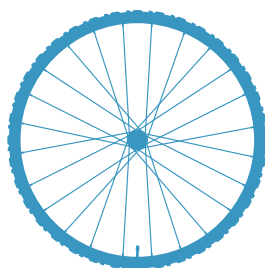
6.30 P.M.

After a refreshing shower, Gosse starts cooking. On tonight's menu: chicken pilaf with cold peach chunks. "You want another great tip? Add a bit of soy sauce to the rice. It makes it taste better."

Every evening Gosse cooks alone. He doesn't have a girlfriend. "I've had lots of offers, mind you," he laughs. "Flemish girls who dream of being the wife of a professional cyclist. You want to avoid these, trust me, Belgians go nuts when it comes to cycling. I'd rather have a partner who can disagree with me. But where do you meet someone like that? Spending a day on Tinder just makes me depressed."

In the meantime, he's gotten used to entertaining himself. He sometimes goes fishing on the Wylerbergmeer, in the evening he sits in the window and plays guitar for passers-by. "The biggest sacrifice I had to make when I started cycling was to stop playing so much music. My record player and my tape recorder are the most important things in my living-room. Do you know this song? It's by Vanderbuyst, three guys who play guitar like gods."

"If you stayed here a week, you'd notice that I live in an incredible cocoon. At times it really sucks to always be alone. I sometimes think to myself: Fuck, what am I doing here? I'll just quit and do something else. But I quickly figured out that apart from cycling, I just don't have that much else."



BIO GOSSE VAN DER MEER

Born
in Surhuizum (1995)
Study
completed his pre-
University education at
the Groningen Talent
School for Top Sports
(Werkman College), now
studying Geography,
Planning and Environ-
ment at Radboud
University (Bachelor's
nearly completed)

8.00 P.M.

In his hammock, Gosse watches a lecture on his laptop. Three courses and a thesis to go and he'll have finished his Bachelor's in Geography, Planning and Environment. He's only had to do one resit: of his very first exam. "I thought: how hard can it be? Well, it was a lot harder than I expected!"

Since then, his studies have been going very well. Two years ago, Gosse was even appointed assistant lecturer for the mapping course. This year he gave his first lecture as a guest lecturer. "I got my own coffee mug to get coffee from the lecturers' hall. That was fun!"

Gosse calls Radboud University extremely top sports-minded 'on paper', but in practice, he often runs into problems. "I once got an email from a lecturer that began: 'If you choose to travel the world, you have to face the consequences'. I failed a course because I missed one group walk through the city when I was taking part in a race abroad, even though I'd passed the exam and all the written assignments. I wasn't allowed to catch up on the walk by myself. But when I run a race that's broadcast on TV, they always mention that I study at Radboud. Free advertising for the University, but I have to make sure my schedule suits them. Though I must say that things did become a lot easier after I made a few calls to the Rector and the Director of the Student Affairs Office."

Gosse thinks it's a pity that it's so difficult to combine sports and study. Not only in Nijmegen, but all over the Netherlands. "You have to be really disciplined and figure out a lot of things yourself. For some time now, I've been able to take exams in Bern, Switzerland, only twenty minutes cycling away from my host family. It's great that this is possible, but I had to figure it all out myself. I stand up for myself, but not everyone does that. That's why so many student athletes quit their studies or their sporting career."

After his cycling career, Gosse would like to become a cartographer. "I'd like to be a kind of digital nomad, so I can work anywhere in the world, until I find a place for myself somewhere."

10.00 P.M.

Before he goes to sleep, Gosse looks again at the map above his bed. Then he dives under the sheets. Tomorrow, he's got to be in the saddle bright and early again. *

Epilogue: four days after this interview, Gosse sends in a WhatsApp photograph of the podium of the mountain bike race in Emmelshausen. On the top stands a Frisian with a moustache.



'I SOMETIMES THINK TO MYSELF: **FUCK, WHAT AM I DOING HERE?** BUT I QUICKLY FIGURED OUT THAT APART FROM CYCLING, I JUST DON'T HAVE THAT MUCH ELSE'



'I'M USUALLY THE ONLY WOMAN'

Ardi Stoios-Braken (52) studied Public Administration and Development Studies in Nijmegen. In September she was appointed Dutch Ambassador to Pakistan. A woman alone – her family stayed home – in a conservative Islamic republic where murder and kidnap are the order of the day. What's that like? *Vox* joined her on a working visit in the world's most dangerous city.

Text and reportage photography: Annemarie Haverkamp / Portrait photograph: Erik van 't Hullenaar



Meeting with Governor of Sindh Province, Mohammad Zubair (left)



“I could never get used to Karachi’s smell.”

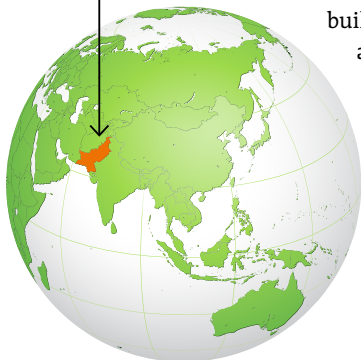
Ardi Stoios-Braken looks out of the window of her armoured car. Buffalos by the side of the road, up to their bellies in the water of a canal that’s also a sewage outlet. The banks are formed from mountains of waste. Children stroll along the stinking heaps, looking for anything of value.

Traffic in this harbour city of more than twenty million inhabitants (most of them extremely poor) is complete chaos. Rickshaws, busses, mopeds and donkey carts race each other in rows five, sometimes ten deep. Police officers hang out of the open car in front of us, gesturing wildly with their hands and guns to clear out of the way. These full-bearded men with their black head kerchiefs are our escort. Their job is to ensure that the Dutch Ambassador gets to her meeting safely. Last year, the English newspaper *The Independent* declared Karachi the most dangerous city in the world. All of Pakistan suffers from a poor image – the inhospitable border area with Afghanistan was issued a negative travel advice because of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Terrorism, murder, disappearance and rape are regular features in the columns of national newspapers.

On the back seat, Stoios-Braken quickly puts the final touch to her lipstick. The programme for today includes a meeting with the Governor of Sindh Province, and she looks impeccable. Colourful ankle-long dress, her long hair swept back into a pony tail. And no, no headscarf.

The reception is at the Governor’s residence, a palatial building that was once home to the first Governor and founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah (a pacifist). Servants in stiff white uniforms serve coffee and snacks, as the Governor sits enthroned in a leather chair and politely tells Stoios-Braken how honoured he is to receive her. She’s been Dutch Ambassador to Pakistan for eight months, but this is the first opportunity they’ve had to meet one another. “He’s an important man in this region,” she explains.

PAKISTAN



Just as she is an important woman in this region. Karachi may stink, but it has a large international harbour, and is a sea entry point into Asia. And whoever thinks of water, thinks of the Netherlands. “Karachi is extremely interesting for our maritime sector. A number of companies with expertise in water are already active here.” The Netherlands is one of Pakistan’s biggest European trade partners. Friesland Campina is already here, and Karachi’s first Spar supermarket has opened its doors.

In her meeting with the Governor, she emphatically asks him to remember the Netherlands when it comes to agricultural collaboration. “Flower bulbs, potatoes,... we can do it all.”

King’s Day

The previous evening, Ardi Stoios-Braken flew in to the coast from her home in Islamabad with ten kilograms of Beemster cheese under her arm. She’s in Karachi for a three-day working visit. One of the highlights is the King’s Day celebration on 9 May. The Dutch King may have celebrated his birthday a while ago, but what Pakistani citizen has Willem-Alexander on their birthday calendar?



More than two hundred guests are expected: business relations, NGOs and the handful of Dutch citizens who live in Karachi. All of them people the Ambassador needs to know in order to promote Dutch interests. The host doesn't have to cut up the cheese herself; the chefs of the hotel where the reception is held will take care of this – although not before the cheese has been screened of course. Everything that enters the premises of business or hotels here must be run through the scanner first. Every time the Ambassador returns to the Marriott Hotel after an appointment, the underside of her car is checked for explosives and sniffed by dogs.

"I don't think much about it," says Stoios-Braken speaking about the intensive security measures. "We have a special team at the embassy just for this purpose." Before she goes on a visit, the embassy people determine whether the trip is safe. If there are any tensions in the area or district, she cancels her trip. Much more often, the authorities simply don't give her permission. "I've never felt afraid here yet."

The situation in Pakistan does limit her freedom. She can only cycle freely within the walls of the compound where she's lived since September. Outside she has to

PAKISTAN

In August 1947 British India was split into two independent states: India (for Hindus) and Pakistan (for Muslims). This resulted in a migration wave of more than twelve million refugees, and more than one million casualties of sectarian terror. India and Pakistan became sworn enemies, both of them nuclear powers. This was clearly not what Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the pacifist founder of Pakistan, had intended: "You are free, free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed — that has nothing to do with the business of the state." This vision notwithstanding, after Jinnah's death, the Islamic Republic was founded in 1956. In the 1970s Dictator Zia-ul-Haq

based his legislation and jurisdiction on the Quran. Blasphemy is still punishable by death. Pakistan supported the Afghan Mujahideen in their fight against the Russians. The country's been plagued for decades by sectarian violence and terrorism and is home to Taliban and Al-Qaida strongholds. Osama Bin Laden, responsible for the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York (2011), was able to hide for years in the city of Abbottabad, right next to a Pakistani Army Academy. The country's relations with Trump's America are terrible. According to the American President, Pakistan is a haven for terrorists. US aid to Pakistan (\$1.3 billion) was suspended in January. The country has been relatively stable in the past few years, which has helped the economy grow.

→ Visiting a network
of Pakistani women

'I'VE
NEVER
FELT
AFRAID
HERE'



rely on a car with a driver. The safety protocol forbids her to drive. "An American diplomat recently caused an accident here. It was so sad, someone died. This American really brought the wrath of the local people upon himself. Now he's been expelled from the country."

It's out of the question for her as a woman to walk on the street alone. Women are rarely seen on the street. If you spot one, chances are she'll be wearing a veil. So it's all the more remarkable that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should have chosen a woman for this post.

"It was a deliberate decision," explains Stoiios-Braken as we take a tour of the Governor's historical residence after the meeting. "The Ministry currently employs 30% of top female diplomats, and their goal is 50-50." The Netherlands also wants to set an example by being represented by women abroad.

Does it work? Stoiios-Braken thinks so. "I'm usually the only woman in a group. I try to draw attention to it in the form of jokes."

That afternoon, she is indeed the only woman among eleven male Pakistani dignitaries attending a press conference about an agricultural fair where Dutch companies will also have the opportunity to introduce themselves. "Good afternoon, dear ladies and (she smiles and looks around the room) *foremost gentlemen*," Her Excellency says at the start of her speech, after the chanted prayer and the National Anthem. More than twenty television cameras zoom in on her.

The fact that women are nearly non-existent on the Pakistani labour market is a huge problem. "Most of them stay at home. You want a better life for these women, but including women is also a precondition if the economy is to succeed," she explains. It is true that the economy is growing, but the fact that such a large



Talking to the press during a press conference

proportion of the population is not contributing hinders development.

Pakistan is one of the countries with the highest percentage of illiteracy in the world: 45% of people can't read or write, and the percentage is higher still among women (58%) (2012 figures). Parents would rather marry their daughters off than send them to school. And even if families approve of schooling, transport is an obstacle. How are girls supposed to get to school safely? Sexual violence is rampant and parents often simply don't dare to let their daughters go out. The same problem occurs when educated young women look for a job. Stoios-Braken: "For women who have completed a university degree, you can't take it for granted that they will continue to work once they get married." The Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum charts gender inequality in 144 countries and Pakistan ranks in the second to last place.

The unavoidable question is: What is an emancipated Brabant woman doing in the conservative Islamic Republic of Pakistan?

Lonely

In a room behind an imposing fence nineteen women are gathered around a conference table. All eyes are on the Ambassador. "I grew up in a small village," she explains. "My mother was a housewife and she cleaned other people's houses for a living. Sometimes I would go and pick her up after school. She wasn't always treated kindly. I remember one of her bosses once making fun of me because I had a local accent. I thought it was so unfair. This experience motivated me to show that I too, could achieve something if I wanted to."

Her audience nods in agreement. The listeners form a

network of Pakistani women who want to make their voice heard. They are human rights activists, health workers and entrepreneurs who share a single mission: to stand up for women's rights. Stoios-Braken encourages and supports them. She is unable to give out funds to support their initiatives, because former development aid has been largely dismantled. The policy now is to stimulate the local population to become self-sufficient. *From aid, to trade.*

As the armoured car dives once again into the hooting traffic chaos, the Ambassador repeats that the seed of her combat against injustice was planted in her native Brabant village of Liempde. "It's true that I'm something of an idealist. I believe we should take care of others, and try within our means to make the world a slightly better place."

She was the first and only one of a family of four to go to university. She chose Nijmegen – a big step for a girl from a small village. Stoios-Braken enrolled for Public Administration and Development Studies. She followed courses with iconic lecturers like Gerrit Huizer and Leon Wecke. In the 1990s Nijmegen was a left-wing stronghold. "I was active in the Socialist Youth Party."

In Leiden, she followed a course on Non-Western Public Administration. There she came into contact with internationalisation. Via an internship in India, she got a temporary job at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She later completed the diplomatic academy. By that time, she'd met her husband Wayne on a holiday in Australia (a classic: he was the tour guide). Together, they've lived in Thailand, Switzerland, Albania and Zambia. They have two children, Jasmin (17) and Tom (14), and took a conscious decision that she would pursue her career while Wayne took care of the household and the children.

"We'd lived in the Netherlands for four years when I was offered the position of Ambassador to Pakistan," she says. "I'd indicated earlier that I was ready for a new challenge in my career. All of a sudden, the opportunity presented itself."

Still, because it was Pakistan, she had to think about it. "We discussed it as a family. Pakistan is no place for children of that age. They can't move around freely, social interaction is very limited, and there's little entertainment. My son certainly didn't want to go. We decided it would be better if I went alone."

Was refusing an option? "Not really, I wanted to be Ambassador, and this opportunity came along. My contract here is only for two years, so it's a fairly short period of time. At home I was also often at work until after 7 p.m., so my children were used to not seeing me much. If something happens, we get in touch immediately. And we see each other every two months."

The first year is nearing its end, and it's gone by very quickly, she says. But whereas on working visits like these, every hour of her time is accounted for, her weekends in Islamabad tend to be empty. "It gets quite lonely at times."

And yet, she thinks it's worth it. Pakistanis are extremely resilient, in her experience, and she believes the



country will ultimately grow in the right direction. “If we can play even a tiny role in this process, it would give me great satisfaction.” Plus, it’s no coincidence that the Netherlands has an embassy in Pakistan. “What happens in this region has consequences for the Netherlands. Just think of the production of narcotics, people trafficking, etc. and if we don’t do something about water management, this country will at some point become unliveable, and we’ll have to deal with climate refugees. Last week, in Sindh Province, temperatures exceeded 50°, the highest temperature ever recorded anywhere in the world in April. There’s no more water in the soil, yet the population continues to grow.”

As far as terrorist attacks are concerned, things have been quiet in Pakistan for a while. This is good for trade, as entrepreneurs suffer tremendously from the country’s bad image. “I always tell them they have to make an effort to include women, because international parties don’t want to trade with a country that oppresses women. This has a motivating effect on people.”

Transgenders

Back at the hotel we’re met by a group of transgenders and gays.

This week, Parliament has passed a historic law guaran-



BIO ARDI STOIOS- BRAKEN

Born
in Liempde (1966)
Study
Public Administration
and Development
Studies

teeing the basic rights of transgenders. There is a long tradition of transsexuality in Pakistan: transgenders traditionally sing and dance at marriages. On a daily basis, however, their life is not so safe. These young people have made an educational film that they want to show to the Ambassador. The new law is great, but they explain that in practice, a lot of things still have to happen before they become really accepted.

“Join us tonight at the King’s Day reception,” says the Ambassador at the end of their short talk. She has to change quickly to be on time for the Orange celebrations. By inviting the transgenders, she’s showing that human rights are high on the Netherlands’ agenda.

A little later, she personally welcomes all her guests, clad in an orange coat made from cloth woven in Pakistan. A colleague hands out red-white-and-blue buttons with the text Keep in touch with the Dutch. The Beemster cheese wins approving glances from the Pakistanis who have sampled it. Male Pakistanis, of course. Here too, you can count the women on the fingers of your two hands. Ardi Stoios-Braken remembers to make a subtle joke about this in her speech. ★

AGENDA



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Radboud Reflects www.ru.nl/radboudreflects

9 JULY, 7.30 p.m. If you want to know more about Buddhism, come and listen to Stephen Batchelor's lecture. Location: Culture Hall C, Radboud University.
14 JULY, 6.30 p.m. Linde Schuppen wonders whether our obsession with the mind at the cost of the body is such a good idea. Location:

Festival Op 't Eiland.
18 JULY, 7.00 p.m. Expressions of powerlessness and discontent like squatting may have a role to play in democracy. Philosopher Mathijs van de Sande calls for renewed appreciation of these kinds of actions. Location: Festival Op 't Eiland.

SUMMER TIPS

22 TO 24 JUNE

Mout Beer Festival

In collaboration with Café Van Ouds, the Julianapark is hosting the third edition of this beer festival. Thirty breweries present 150 different beers. Add a bit of music and some sunshine, and you've got yourself a party.

22 TO 24 JUNE

Valkhof Theatre Avenue

On the same weekend, in the Valkhof Park, come and enjoy Theater Avenue, with dozens of national and international acts sharing the podium. The theatre festival looks a bit like a fair, with visitors strolling from one show to the next, staying as long as they want.

29 JUNE

Island Run

A new Island Run is organised this summer. You can run five or ten kilometres across the new city island on the Waal. If you don't feel like tiring yourself out, relax and soak up the atmosphere from one of the beach chairs. You can even have a barbecue!

29 JUNE TO 20 JULY

De Kaaij

De Kaaij has become a household name in Nijmegen. Under the Waalburg you'll find music, yoga, theatre and lovely food from local products.

STAFF

www.ru.nl/pv

29 JUNE

Radboud Sports

Open to all students, staff members and alumni. Including a Sports Festival programme with workshops on campus.

ADVERTISEMENT







Autoverhuur Nijmegen
Nieuwe Dukenburgseweg 13, 6534 AD, Nijmegen
Postbus 1130, 6501 BC Nijmegen
Tel. 024-3817161

STAY UP TO DATE!



For students who want to stay in the loop

Read Vox to stay up to date. We report on all Radboud University news and student life on paper, as well as online and on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

-  voxweb.nl
-  facebook.com/voxweb.nl
-  twitter.com/voxnieuws
-  instagram.com/voxweb.nl

redactie@vox.ru.nl
024 361 18 92

Would you like to write articles, take photo's or do promotion work for Vox? Don't hesitate to contact us!



BOMBTRACK

