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Nonja Yvonne Huberta Maria Peters was born in Tilburg on 27 February 1944, when the Nazi still occupied the Netherlands. Her mother was pregnant of her as a forced labourer in an ammunition factory in Strasbourg, then Germany now France. Her family migrated to Western Australia in 1949 and moved around the wheatbelt before settling in Northam. Its military camps had been converted into first accommodation for non-English speaking migrants and Displaced Persons from Western, Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States.

#### **Educational and work 1960-2000:**

Between 1950 to 1959, she attended 5 primary schools in Subiaco, Toodyay and Northam High School. At 15, at the end of third year high she started work to help with the family budget. In Northam her first job was jewelry shop assistant, followed by typist/telephonist. She went to the Netherlands beginning 1961, and worked there as hospital admissions clerk. On return to Northam, she became a ledger machinist bookkeeper at Beaurepaire Tyre Service in Northam and two years later, when the family moved to Perth was a ledger machinist at the Public Works, Main Roads and Crown Law Departments.

In 1968, she married Robert Peters, a UK migrant. They had two sons, Bradley (1968) and Richard (1970). She and her husband built wheat silos on farms around Western Australia for the first year of Bradley's life and then settled in Glen Forest, where her parents ran the village's one stop shop. In 1977, her husband was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). She attended TAFE and completed a mature entrance to the University of Western Australia (UWA) and commenced a Bachelor degree in 1980, while raising two small children and dealing with her husband's ever more debilitating MS. When he died in 2009, he was totally incapacitated. His illness journey had lasted for 32 ever more debilitating years.

During her university education she undertook heritage/historical studies of the military camps in WA used to accommodate migrants. By that time, she had completed a PhD in anthropology in migration research, which she passed cum laude in 1999, she was already bridging the gap between academia and the public with museum exhibitions on various aspects of the post-war migration story. Her first exhibitions were self-funded until she worked out how to access granting opportunities and work in various collaborations. In 2022, she continues to produce exhibitions and books.

#### **University Education 1980 -1999**

1988: Awarded BA Honours: thesis – The Ascetic Anorexic

1999: Awarded PhD cum laude, University of Western Trading Places: Greek, Italian, Dutch and Vietnamese Enterprise in Western Australia.

2004: Awarded a five-year Curtin University Research Fellowship for postdoctoral research on **Dutch maritime, military and mercantile connections with Australia from 1606.**

#### **Professional Positions at various times between 2000 - 2022**

- Adjunct Professor (Humanities and Arts) – Edith Cowan University
- Adjunct Associate Professor John Curtin Institute Public Policy (JCIPP)
- Guest Researcher (History) - Huygens ING: Den Haag, Zuid-Holland, NL
- Awarded a 'Visiting Professorship' at the University of Amsterdam by to rewrite & publish, her PhD on immigrant entrepreneurs
- Visiting NWO (*Nederlands Wetenschappelijk Organisatie* – equal to ARC) Professor at the Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies) - University of Amsterdam
- Board member - Royal Western Australian Historical Society
- Member of the Advisory committee - Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Australia
- Adjunct Professor (Department of Digital Humanities) - Western Sydney University
- Visiting Fellow - Australian National University National Europe Centre



- **Inaugural Director** of the Migration, Ethnicity, Refugees and Citizenship Research Unit - Curtin University
- **Director** of History of Migration Experiences (HOME) Research Unit Curtin University.
- 1994-1997, Curator Western Australian Museum working on a large migration exhibition.

#### Awards/Honours:

1. **Knighthood** from Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. Appointed by Royal Decree in April 2006, in the Order of Orange-Nassau for “outstanding service in the preservation of Dutch Australians cultural heritage and fostering bilateral relationships.”
2. **Centenary Medal** for outstanding service in “preserving the migrant heritage of Dutch and other post-war migrants 2003.”
3. **Achievement Award** by the National Council of Jewish Women for outstanding achievements in her field. Noted that Nonja is not Jewish 2002.
4. Shortlisted for **Living National Treasures**
5. **Appointed to the Council of the National Library of Australia Canberra** by the Governor General Quentin Bryce, for two terms 2010 and 2013.
6. **Vice Chair of the WA Maritime Museum Advisory Committee** from 2005 - 2017.
7. **2022, Inducted into the Western Australian Women’s Hall of Fame, for her work on the digital and other preservation of Dutch immigrants’ cultural heritage.**

#### Literary Awards

- Special commendation 1993, WA Premiers Inaugural History award - for her exhibition. It was the Postwar Migration to Western Australia: The Northam Camps.

#### Premier’s Literary Awards - short-listed

- *Milk and Honey But No Gold: Postwar Migration to Western Australia 1945-1964*, University of Western Australia Press
  - 1) 2001, Western Australian Premier's Book Awards – non-fiction.
  - 2) 2002, Queensland Premier's Literary Awards - for Best History Book.
  - 3) 2002, NSW Premier’s State Records NSW- John and Patricia Ward History Prize.
- 2012: **Won** the Curtin Humanities book of the Year: *We Came By Sea* – WA Museum publication to accompany the Welcome Walls launch, which Nonja curated with the museum team – the launch attracted 8000. The book was very successful.

#### Contributor short-listed Literary Awards

- 1996: Short-listed. **NSW Premier’s Literary Award** Jenny Gregory (ed), *On the Homefront: Western Australia and World War II*, UWA Press, Nedlands. (‘Arriving in the Lucky Country’ N. Peters contributing author).
- 2012: Paul Longley Arthur and Geoffrey Bolton (eds). ‘*Voices of the West End of Fremantle*. Fremantle: WA Museum. “Immigration on Victoria Quay 1906-2006,’ N. Peters contributing author, WA Premier’s Literary Award.
- 2006: *The Dutch Down Under 1606-2006*, UWA Press 2006, commendation in **Hansard**, the official record of debates in the Australian parliament.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Rabobank purchased 150 copies to give to delegates at their conference; the Dutch Embassy Canberra and Australian Embassy The Hague purchased 100 copies each to give to VIPs.



Invited to launch exhibitions and open festivals in the Netherlands and Australia in 2006.

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## Exhibitions

### EXHIBITIONS

She is curator of 25 exhibition on postwar migration to Australia including Dutch migration, and the impact on indigenous groups of the Dutch incursion into the Indian Ocean Region since 1602, in Australia, Indonesia (Kesar Is. and Jakarta), South Africa and Namibia:

- 2022, *Moving People*, Australia the Netherlands: on display in the Residence of the Australian Ambassador in the Hague June 8 to 31 July to celebrate the 80-years diplomatic relationship between Australia and the Netherlands.
- 2021: *Depok: A Colonial Tale Unravels* on display at the Indisch Herinnerings Centrum (IHC) The Hague, September 2020 – December 2021.
- 2019: **'Verlander'** Het Nederlands Vestingmuseum, Naarden, Netherlands.
- 2019: *Depok: De Droom van Cornelis Chastelein Chastelein*, West Frisian Museum 29 June – 29 October, Nonja Peters & Geert Snoeijer curators.
- 2017: Geert Snoeijer, Nonja Peters, Bart de Graaff & Aone van Engelenhoven, exhibition **Verlander** - Southern Africa and Namibia, National Museum Bloemfontein 25 November – 25 February 2017.
- **2016-2021: Verlander: Forgotten Children of the VOC (Dutch East India Company)**, Nonja Peters (curator), Geert Snoeijer (Portrait Photographer), Bart de Graaff independent historian and & Aone van Engelenhoven (linguist). WA Museum, Geraldton, National Museum, Bloemfontein, West Frisian Museum, Hoorn and Vestings Museum Naarden, and the *Gedung Tjipta Niaga*, Gallery – hosted by Erasmus House, Jakarta, Indonesia and 'The Garrison', Cape Town, South Africa. ([vimeo.com/202206059](https://vimeo.com/202206059)).
- 2016: Nonja Peters, Guest Curator, **The Dutch on the Western Edge 1616-2016**, at State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) 24 June 2016 - 26 September 2016.
- 2016: Nonja Peters & Geert Snoeijer (curators), *Descendants of the VOC*, Western Australian Museum, Geraldton, 5 November 2016- 26 February 2017.
- 2016: Geert Snoeijer & Nonja Peters (curators), **Verlander**, Westfries Museum, Hoorn the Netherlands, 16 December 2016 – Feb 2017.
- 2016: Nonja Peters curator, KEMH – Harry Cohen Gallery – 10 November – 10 March – A Touch of Dutch exhibition, 15 November 2016 – 15 March 2017.
- 2012: *The Bombing of Broome*, exhibition prepared to commemorate the lives lost at the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of their death. It was on display for a variety of local, state, national and international venues.
- 2010: *Welcome Walls*, Western Australian Maritime Museum.
- 2006: *Dutch Invisibility: Myth Fact or Fiction*, Fremantle History Museum July 20–Sept 2.
- 2003-2004: *Transpositions: Dutch Australians Art in Context*, Art-on-the-Move, and traveling exhibition.
- 2002: *Aanpassen and Invisibility, being Dutch in Australia*, on display at the WA Museum April-May.
- 2000 – 2017: *Journey to the Promised Land*, a travelling exhibition on post-war immigration is now permanently on display at the Railway Museum in Northam WA. Launched at the



Northam Multicultural festival it attracted thousands of visitors. It is still on display at the Railway Museum in Northam.

- 1998: *A Sense of Place: Postwar Migration to Northam*, on permanent display at the Visitor Centre, Northam. Still on display in the Northam Visitor Centre, Grey Street.
- 1996 – 2009: *A New Australia: Postwar Migration to WA*, permanent display Western Australian Museum.
- 1992 – 1993: *Postwar Migration to Western Australia: The Northam Camps*, on display WA Museum Perth and in Northam at the Art Gallery. Later at various libraries including Bassendean and Bunbury.

#### **Current occupation, title, and industry**

- Adjunct Associate Professor at Curtin University Institute of Public Policy
- Professor at ECU in Digital Humanities and Social Sciences
- Director of the Edith Cowan Centre for Global Issues, in the School of Arts
- Working with Ambassadors in Australia and the Netherlands and actively involved in bilateral projects between both countries- the Broome Attack 1942-2022; researching and writing the history of the Dutch East India Company ship Leeuwin which mapped part of the WA coast where the Leeuwin Lighthouse now stands in 1622, for celebrations in Augusta Margaret River.
- Helping the HMAS Armidale group identify the family of the victims who went down with the ship after it was attacked by the Japanese 1942.
- Preparing an exhibition with Huygens institute Dutch History (Amsterdam) on People movement between Netherlands Australia and reverse, for display in the Australian Ambassador's residence in The Hague, June 2022. Writing an historical study (a book) on immigrants in business in WA.

#### **Working life leadership appointments/roles/achievements:**

I sit or have sat on boards and advisory committees, about migration that include:

- Two years on the Royal WA Historical Society;
- 16 years on the Maritime Museum Advisory Committee (Vice Chair),
- 10 years on the Board of Dutch Australians in Perth,
- 6 years on Friends of the Batty Library
- About 10 years on the National Archives of Australia in Perth
- 3 years on the Golden Pipeline interpretation Committee, National Trust of Australia WA).

#### **Initiator**

- Co-founder in 1986, of the Dutch Australia Community Service (DACCS) - a volunteer service providing home-bound elderly Dutch with aged-care.
- Co-founded of the Migration Research network, bringing together academics from all WA universities, heritage and cultural organisations for workshops and presentations.
- Founder of the Northam Army Camp Heritage Association (**NACHA**) with Max Trenordan.
- In 1999 & 2000, I was central to the organisation of two multicultural festivals in Northam that attracted around 10,000 former migrants to Northam.
- Organised ships reunion days for migrants from various national backgrounds who travelled to Australia on the same ship and a plethora of exhibitions, books, documentaries, and other forms of media to tell the migrant story.
- Initiated heritage studies on the Western Australian military camps used to house migrants in the townships of Northam and Cunderdin, and in Perth in the suburbs of Graylands, Swanbourne and Point Walter with Jenny Gregory at the Centre for History, UWA 1992-1994.
- Heritage study on Immigration Complex Building Victoria Quay with heritage architect **xxxx**



**Volunteer roles community volunteering - as above - but also as initiator and** advisor to the artists with reference to my research:

- 1995 Northam Hospital fresco - artist Judith Bradshaw (advisor)
- 2004 Fremantle Wharf with public art artist Tony Jones (advisor)
- 2006 De Vlamingh on the Swan River - Joan and Charley Smith (initiator)
- 2013 Annette van Voort – international photographer - the Pilbara Story
- 2022 Broome attack public art - Chris Maher
- Geert Snoeijer (portrait photographer) Verlander exhibition and book on display in the Netherlands and internationally; and the Depok exhibition on display at the Westfris museum and the Indisch Herinneringscentrum, The Hague
- Advising Michael Rakowitz, on public art for The Hague related to the diaspora of Dutch and Indonesian Dutch fleeing from the Revolution for Independence in Indonesia in 1945.

### **Personal roles**

Mother of two sons Bradley and Richard, and grandmother of eight wonderful grandchildren (Danica 25, Jessica 23, twins Jaeger and Minaida and Samantha all 14, Mira 10 and twins Octavious and Raphael 7).

### **Unique Life Journey**

(specific challenges or barriers the Inductee has overcome, e.g., health, disability, cultural, regional, and remote):

I had to leave school at 15 to help with family finances and because my father didn't believe in educating females. In 1960 I commenced work as a shop assistant until, a few weeks later, my father decided that I should be a telephonist typist. He had set up an interview with International Harvester in Northam. This I did for just over a year. Then my grandmother came to Australia from the Netherlands – armed with the idea that we should all go back with her. My father sent me as a token – I turned 17 on the ship. I was to learn the Dutch language, earn my keep and my fare back and study to be a chiropodist like my aunt. I started work in an office sending letters in response to client complaints – these were standardised so that was easy. After a couple of weeks, my paternal grandfather decided I needed a better job and had me interviewed for the admissions department of the city's teaching hospital. I was in this job – all emergencies also came through admissions - until mid 1962, when I boarded a ship to come back to WA. On arrival – I hadn't been able to earn enough for the return fare – when I stepped off the gangplank my father informed me that I would be going to Perth for a week – so two days hence -to learn the Ledger machine. had never hear of one – to become the accountant for Beaurepaire Tyre Service in Northam. I had no idea what ledger machines did, or what a trial balance was and, in any case I hate working with numbers. However, he had tied me to a bank for two years to pay off the loan for my return trip home so I was stuck! Because the chiropody diploma he had wanted me to gain in the Netherlands was not recognised in Australia!

I commenced upper secondary education (part-time), leading to tertiary education when my husband was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 1977. By then we had two small sons, Bradley born in 1968 and Richard in 1970. I was my husband carer for the next 32 years, of worsening MS to quadriplegic and unable to verbalise until his death in 2009. Our boys only knew a sick father. Robert, my husband hated me going to university – he claimed that I should be happy to help out by working at the check-out of a local grocery store. As he was going down-hill physically, I was moving up academically and that was also a huge issue for him. It was very difficult for us all particularly as the MS plaques were on Robert's frontal lobes as well as everywhere else in his brain. He was often very angry!!

Please advise of any other web links you would like to be referenced by the WA Women's Hall of Fame:

\* Yes     No

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/aimd/aimd-12.html> this was compiled in 2004 so stops at that time.  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE1959b.htm>



I also have invited entries in 2008/9 in *Who's Who of Western Australians* and *Who's Who of Australian Women, Leadership and Beyond*.

[www.daaag.org](http://www.daaag.org)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/nonja-peters-7a974721/>

The following is a summary of information provided by the person who completed your nomination.

There are three versions. The longer version is for media reference and the website, the shorter version will be used as your citation, and the snapshot, for media releases etc.

Please review the summaries carefully, including your title.

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**PUBLIC TITLE:** Dr Nonja Peters, Author & Historian

**SNAPSHOT:**

Nonja is an historian, anthropologist, museum curator and social researcher whose expertise is transnational migration (forced and voluntary) and resettlement in Australia.

**SHORT VERSION:**

Nonja is an historian, anthropologist, museum curator and social researcher whose expertise is transnational migration (forced and voluntary) and resettlement in Australia. She is the author of 10 books, many museum exhibitions, journal articles, TV documentaries, and government consultancies and reports. Her achievements and dedication towards raising awareness of the post-war migration experience from 1945 and preserving migrant's cultural heritage, have earned her wide acclaim.

**LONG VERSION:**

Nonja is an historian, anthropologist, museum curator and social researcher whose expertise is transnational migration (forced and voluntary) and resettlement in Australia. She is the author of 10 books, and a plethora of museum exhibitions, journal articles, TV documentaries, and many government reports. Her achievements and dedication towards raising awareness of the post-war migration experience from 1945 and preserving migrant's cultural heritage, have earned her wide acclaim.

Nonja is passionate about her work and promoting the experiences of the peoples and groups she researches in a respectful manner, to give them a platform from which to tell their story – and be heard. She is currently working bilaterally with universities and research institutes to conceptualise a model to preserve migrants records in home and host-land – digitally.