



POWERED BY DIVERSITY

KEYNOTE
DR. PHILOMENA
ESSED

ZATERDAG 20 DECEMBER 2014
OP DE VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT
VAN 12.00 TOT 16.00 UUR



WORKSHOPS: DECOLONIZING THE UNIVERSITY, POWERED BY DIVERSITY,
DIVERSITEIT OP DE ARBEIDSMARKT, GENDER DIVERSITY EN MEER...

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Although the Netherlands is internationally known as one of the most liberal and ‘tolerant’ countries, racism is still embedded in the fabric of Dutch society. In 2013, the year the Dutch commemorated 150 years of abolition of slavery however, a fierce national debate around racism arose as ethnic minority groups, especially from the Afro-Dutch community, voiced their concerns about racist elements of the Dutch Saint Nicolas holiday. One of the central figures in the Saint Nicolas festivities is Zwarte Piet (Black Pete) which is a blackface caricature with big red lips, curly hair with a subservient role. People of African descent have protested against the tradition as many of them find it offensive and racist. The protest stirred a heated national debate reflecting the Dutch problem with racial discrimination.

The protest gained momentum in 2013 as several people filed a law suit against the city of Amsterdam for facilitating the festivities. The court ruled in favor of the petitioners based on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), based on statistical data, information of the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (College van de Rechten van de Mens, CRM) and statements by the claimants. The court ruled that Zwarte Piet is a negative stereotype of black people and based on this the municipality of Amsterdam should reconsider its decision to grant a permit. The mayor of Amsterdam, van der Laan however, chose to appeal against the court’s decision.¹ The next hearing is planned on October 16th 2014 at the Council of the State. The debate gained more attention as a working group of the United Nations of People of African Descent working on behalf of the UN Commissioner on Human Rights announced an investigation on the tradition and racism affecting people of African descent and urged the government to abandon this practice.²

The Dutch Institute of Human Rights stated that racial discrimination is a taboo in Dutch society and has received little attention over the past years. In October 2013 the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) published a report in which it stated that the Netherlands needs to better address racism in society.³ The protest against Black Pete is more than a protest against a “racist caricature” and the “innocent children’s holiday”. The protest essentially is a symbolic struggle against structural inequality, micro aggressions, racism and discrimination which have been normalized in daily routines, dominant discourse and traditions but also structures such as the labor market and the education system. Just like masks and Blacked faces serve to hide people true faces to take on a mythical identity, the Black Pete seems to hide the Dutch ambivalent relation with its colonial history, slavery and its legacy. When we look beyond the surface of the Black Pete debate it exposes structural problems in Dutch society of everyday and institutional racism and structural inequality rooted in 400 years of colonial cultural production. From primary school to higher education black and minority children are faced with structural obstacles such as low expectations of teachers based on stereotypical images and prejudice of teachers resulting in lower rates of attendance in higher

¹ [http://www.non-discrimination.net/content/media/NL-96-](http://www.non-discrimination.net/content/media/NL-96-Amsterdam%20District%20Court%20%20Black%20Pete%20is%20a%20Negative%20Stereotype.pdf)

[Amsterdam%20District%20Court%20%20Black%20Pete%20is%20a%20Negative%20Stereotype.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14013&LangID=E)

² <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14013&LangID=E>

³ <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/netherlands/NLD-CbC-IV-2013-039-ENG.pdf>



education. On the labor market black and minority people are faced with the same stereotypes and prejudice fostering labor market discrimination. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) has done research on labor market discrimination and argued that “unfavorable imaging of migrant groups influence decisions about individual jobseekers. (...) Selection decisions are not ethnically neutral; prejudice plays a role.’ According to the Dutch Institute of Human Rights Black Pete is a form of a racist stereotype which may lead to discriminatory behavior towards black people. The unemployment rate of 28,4% among migrant youths which is three times as high in comparison to native Dutch youths of which only 9,8 % are unemployed.⁴ Research by Amnesty International, published in 2013 as well, showed how black and minority youth are more likely to be stopped and frisked by the police due to ethnic profiling.⁵

Several Dutch social scientists including one of the board members of the Dutch Institute of Human Rights Philomena Essed published a book called Dutch Racism. They concluded that racism in the Netherlands is complex, paradoxical and a taboo subject. Its existence is denied in the public sphere, in education and in the media. Over the past year however, the Netherlands made progression towards the acknowledgement of the existence of racial discrimination as the debate about Black Pete created space to discuss deeper lying and often ignored issues around racism and inequality. The CRM stated that the government has a responsibility to facilitate a respectful national dialogue with the goal to create mutual understanding about the perspectives of different groups on this tradition.⁶ The European Commission against Racism and Tolerance recommended to the authorities to develop a national strategy and policy against racism and racial discrimination covering various fields of life (including employment, education, access to services and access to public spaces) .



Goals:

- Raising awareness about the relation between Black Pete, racial discrimination and structural inequality through (social) media campaigns and online and offline educational events and materials
- Mobilizing grassroots networks of youth, students and activist to fight against racism and discrimination and advocate for change through non-violent tactics
- To influence policy and decision making processes on the level of the city of Amsterdam and on a national level with the aim to develop anti-racism and discrimination policies through involvement of and cooperation with local and national politicians

Project's objectives:

- The realization of online and offline campaigns, and activities to educate, mobilize and influence people as described in the description of activities including an interactive website
- The development of educational material to raise awareness, influence public opinion and create mutual understanding and dialogue in regards to blackface, Black Pete, racial discrimination, institutional racism, structural inequality and cultural diversity such as video recorded presentations, lectures and articles
- Contribution to the development of a concrete plan and national strategy against racism and discrimination as proposed by the ECRI and the CRM, and a debate in the city council of Amsterdam and the Dutch Parliament in cooperation with partner organizations

⁴ http://www.ser.nl/nl/~media/files/internet/publicaties/overige/2010_2019/2013/maak-baan-voor-een-nieuwe-generatie.ashx

⁵ http://www.amnesty.nl/sites/default/files/public/amnesty_stopandsearchpowersposearisktohumanrights.pdf

⁶ <http://www.mensenrechten.nl/publicaties/detail/34310>



On Saturday 20th December New Urban Collective will organize the conference 'Powered by Diversity', the culmination of NUC Unchained activities (which were?) organized over the past year including debates, master classes and an exchange to London around the legacy of slavery, institutional racism, discrimination and Black Pete.

The Black Pete debate has not only sparked an (inter)national debate about Dutch racism but also exposed Dutch society's problem with racism in the areas of education, on the labor market, ethnic profiling, in terms of gender cultural diversity and more. The debate has created space to discuss these issues and opportunities for institutional and societal change. Instead of looking at the negative side of cultural diversity, we aim to discuss how we can use it in our benefit. What would you like to see changed and how can we make this change happen? How can we use the power of diversity on a personal level and on a collective level to stimulate change towards a more equal and inclusive society?

Renowned scholar and member of the Dutch Institute of Human Rights Philomena Essed will be the keynote speaker at the symposium. She has co-edited the book Dutch Racism and has developed several trainings on how to deal with race, gender and culture in a constructive way. You will be able to work on practical solutions, action plans and recommendations in during the working sessions on several topics (see tentative program).

The output of the conference will be translated into an action plan for 2015 and a policy paper which will be send to local and national authorities.

Participants can apply via the website: <http://nucnet.nl/powered-diversity-conference-keynote-dr-philomena-essed>

Program	
12.00 – 12.20	Welcome
12.20 – 12.30	Introduction – Mitchell Esajas NUC
12.30 – 12.50	Keynote: Philomena on Dutch Racism and the power of diversity +Q & A
12.50 – 13.00	Break and move to workshops
13.00 – 13.40 13.40 – 13.50 13.50 – 14.30	Workshops: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Powered by personal leadership and gender diversity- Powered by education: decolonizing the schools- Powered on the labor market- Powered by politics & activism- Powered by human rights (ethnic profiling)
14.30 – 14.50	Break
14.50 – 16.00	3 minute pitch per group + 3 min. Q & A , dialogue and reflection
15.45 – 16.00	Empowerment speech Astrid + Conclusion Mitchell
16.00 – 17.00	Drinks