

The Ideologically Colonized Metropole: Dutch Racism and Racist Denial

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Abstract

Many in The Netherlands deny the existence of race and racism even as significant research strongly suggests otherwise. This paper synthesized existing literature to illuminate The Netherlands' unique form of racism, which is rooted in racial neoliberalism, anti-racialism (i.e. the denial of race), racial Europeanization, and the particular Dutch history of colonial exploitation. This article summarizes existing scholarship addressing racism in wide array of social institutions in The Netherlands before addressing the historical roots of Dutch racism and how Dutch aphasia and racial Europeanization deny the links between contemporary and historical oppression before, finally, offering an explanation for this disconnect.

Introduction

Ask a White Dutch person about racism in their society and most will quickly respond that, except for maybe a few right-wing politicians and individual racist incidents each year, racism does not exist. Indeed, it cannot. Because, according to many, “race” does not exist in The Netherlands (Essed and Nimako 2006; Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006; Hondius forthcoming, 2009; Mielants 2009; van der Valk 2002; van Dijk 1993). With “race” and “racism” considered taboo and anti-racialism prevailing (de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2011; Goldberg 2009),¹ policymakers and scholars alike prefer the term “ethnicity,” which evokes notions of culture but fails to account for hierarchical power and value implications central to racial identities and racialization processes embedded in Dutch society (Cornell and Hartmann 2007; Essed and Nimako 2006; Essed and Trienekens 2008; Omi and Winant 1994). This preference for “ethnicity” over “race” obscures the reality of daily and institutional racism of those experiencing these phenomena (Essed and Nimako 2006; Essed and Trienekens 2008; Wodak and van Dijk 2000).

Although discrimination in housing and employment has been documented since the late 1970s (Bovenkerk 1978), critical research addressing race and racism has lagged since the only institutional setting, the Center for Race and Ethnic Studies at the University of Amsterdam devoted to critical scholarship and led by the Chris Mullard, the first Black Professor of Ethnic Studies in Europe, was shuttered in 1991 (Essed and Nimako 2006). Combined with the national denial of race and racism, the lack of independent granting agencies in The Netherlands inhibiting most scholars from acquiring funding to study racism, and faculty and graduate students of color in Dutch universities has hindered critical scholarship addressing this subject for nearly two decades (Essed and Nimako 2006; Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006; Mullard 1991; Nimako 2012; Prins 2007, 2004, 2002).

Research published in the 1980s and 1990s addressing indifference within the Dutch multicultural tolerance paradigm (Mullard, Nimako & Willemsen, 1991), daily racism experienced by highly educated Surinamese women (Essed 1991, 1990, 1987), racial imagery in Dutch

culture (Pieterse 1990), racism within elite discourse (van Dijk 1993, 1983), the effect of racism and discrimination alongside home cultures on youth subcultures (Sansone 1994), and theoretical conceptualizations of policies related to racial minorities (Nimako and Willemsen 2000) and critical examinations of the social construction of “ethnic minorities” which assumed cultural differences in The Netherlands (Rath 1991) laid the foundation for contemporary critical scholarship. This research also profoundly challenged the national narrative of a tolerant Netherlands. Essed’s (1987, 1990) work, in particular, was highly critiqued for her research within and outside of academia and resulted in the large-scale silencing of many within Dutch academia, forcing many to continue their work in universities outside of the country (de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2011; Essed and Nimako 2006; Prins 2004).

Although contemporary university-based research focuses primarily on cultural differences between native White Dutch and immigrant/non-White Dutch (Essed and Nimako 2006; Prins 2002), scholars have continued to document historically rooted deeply embedded institutionalized racist policies and practices (cf. Alkan 2001; Cain 2007; Essed and Hoving ; Essed and Nimako 2006; Essed and Trienekens 2008; Hondius 2009; Nimako and Willemsen 2011). More recent scholars have identified contemporary structural (Ghorashi and Tilburg 2006; Vollebergh 2002), discursive (Mok 1999; van der Valk 2002; van Dijk 2008, 2000; Weiner forthcoming a, forthcoming b), and institutionalized interpersonal racism (Hondius 1999), as well as the effects of racial categories and racial discrimination on identities (de Leeuw and Rydin 2007; Ghorashi 2009), intersectionality (Bal 2005; Wekker 2004; Wekker and Lutz 2001), and transnationalism (Gowricharn, 2004, 2009). Scholars have also documented the role of racist discourses in shaping policies relating to citizenship and nationalism (de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012, 2011; Ghorashi 2010, 2003; Mutsaers and Siebers 2012), and in justifying historical and contemporary colonial and international policies and actions (Captain and Jones 2007; de Leeuw 2010, 2002; Wekker 2007). These findings notwithstanding, anti-racist popular discourse continues to deny the existence of race and racism in The Netherlands.

Racial definitions

Race is more than just an identity or social category. It is a system of power relations and structurally embedded meanings, which assigns groups to different categories reflecting perceptions of inferiority and superiority of perceived biological and/or cultural differences and then maintained through often-color-blind social policies and practices (Bonilla-Silva 2006, 1997; Feagin 2006; Omi and Winant 1994). These interlocking phenomena structure inequality by inhibiting minority access to important social resources such as political power, jobs, education, quality housing stock, healthy neighborhoods, and accurate group representation in the media (Weiner 2012). Whites’ ability to routinely access these resources, and exclude minorities from doing so, constitutes privileges which many Whites are unaware they possess (Frankenberg 1993; Lipsitz 1998). This “new,” or “laissez faire,” racism, described as “new realism” in The Netherlands (Prins 2007, 2002), allows members of the dominant group to retain racially informed ideologies, and blame minorities’ cultural differences, rather than structural inequalities, for their lower socioeconomic position and consigns them to perpetual outsider status (Balibar 1991; Bobo, Kluegel and Smith 1997; de Leeuw and van Wichelen forthcoming, 2012; Essed and Trienekens 2008; Ghorashi 2010, 2003, van Dijk 1993). This hegemonic ideology, combined with enduring stereotypes of minority inferiority, ensures that deeply embedded structures of racism go undetected and unchallenged to perpetuate racial inequality in many Western societies (Bonilla-Silva 2000; Gramsci 1971; Winant 2001). Though often unacknowledged, these phenomena occur throughout Dutch society.

As in many European nations, The Netherlands utilizes ethnic rather than racial categories. But official government categories reveal racialized conceptions of the national identity. Most White Dutch attribute “Dutchness,” and thus membership in the national community, to White Europeans born in The Netherlands (Essed and Trienekens 2008). This is manifest in the terms, which appeared in the 1980s, used to describe Dutch, *autochtonen*, and non-Dutch, *allochtonen*. The definition of *allochtonen* used by the Dutch government, “residents born elsewhere, as well as their children, even when born in the Netherlands and even when one parent was born in the Netherlands” (Essed and Trienekens 2008, pp. 57), usually signifies “non-White” or “alien” (Jacobs 2002). *Autochtoon* indicates the opposite of *allochtoon* – indigenous, native, and authentic Dutch – and reflects the explicitly higher value attributed to this identity. In common parlance, these words stand in for “Dutch insider” and “minority outsider.” Although a third-generation Curaçaoan born in Amsterdam may only speak Dutch, act culturally Dutch, and be a Dutch citizen, to White Dutch, he is considered *allochtoon* (Essed and Trienekens 2008). This boundary creation and policing inhibits the social acceptance of multiple-generation non-European immigrants who share nativity, language, culture, and citizenship with “native Dutch.” To be “Dutch” is to be “White,” and with this identity come special privileges (Essed and Trienekens 2008) in all realms of Dutch society. Although children, teens, and adults express elements of hybrid identities (de Leeuw and Rydin 2007; Ghorashi 2009; Sansone 1994), current terminology does not easily allow migrants to claim multiple identities (Ghorashi 2009), such as Turkish-Dutch or Ghanaian-Dutch.

Dutch Antilleans, Surinamese, Turks, and Moroccans represent the four largest non-Western minority groups in The Netherlands today. Antilleans and Surinamese have been in The Netherlands for centuries but began arriving in increasing numbers in the 1970s and 1980s due to Suriname’s independence and an economic downturn in the Antilles (Lucassen and Penninx 1998; Oostindie 1988; van Niekirk, 2007). The Dutch state initially encouraged immigration from Turkey and Morocco in the 1960s and 1970s as guest workers but rescinded their welcome following The Netherlands’ economic downturn and rise in Islamophobia (even though not all are Muslim) during the 1990s. By then, The Netherlands had positioned Turks and Moroccans at the bottom of the racial hierarchy (Crul and Doornick 2003; van de Worpforst and van Tubergen 2007).

Contemporary racism

Discursive racism in The Netherlands

Discourses throughout the media, in sports, advertising, newspapers, and television broadcasts, all exhibit discursive racism distancing a naturalized White Dutch population from stereotypical essentialized “others” within the national borders. Cultural deficit discourses, often articulated as a form of “new realism” demanding complete immigrant integration (Prins 2007, 2002), pervade Dutch society and attribute socioeconomic disadvantage to essentialized inferior cultures and practices within minority communities (Ghorashi 2010, 2003; Glastra 1999; Gowricham 2003; Rath 1991). Long-standing stereotypes and deficit perceptions of Surinamese and Antillean Dutch persist alongside newer discourses of Muslims with similar effects on socioeconomic attainment. Adherence to Islam is the dominant marker of cultural difference in The Netherlands today, particularly with the widespread belief in its cultural incompatibility with “modern” “Democratic” Dutch society (Ahmad 2004; de Leeuw and van Wichelen forthcoming, 2012, 2005; Mielants 2009) and subsequent construction in the media and political discourse.

White Dutch deploy derogatory terms in daily language denoting difference between White and non-White Dutch. There is no term equivalent to “Black” or “Afro-Dutch” in The Netherlands. While some communities use the term “*zwarte*” for Black, based on American and pan-African conceptions of the term, the Dutch equivalent of “Negro” (*neger*) continues to appear in popular discourse, the media and textbooks. In professional settings, terms such as *excausneger* (token Negro) persist. White Dutch often refer to people of color as *mensen met een kleurtje*. This translates to “person with a little color” but the “tje” added to the end of a word is diminutive thereby linguistically minimizing people and groups (cf. Hondius forthcoming).

Stereotypical media discourses (re-) construct a collective (homogenous) modern Dutch identity in a neoliberal context (Demmers and Mehendale 2010). Popular media discursively constructs Turkish and Moroccan Dutch as fostering “illegal immigration,” “violent,” “dishonest,” “intrusive,” “slackers,” “complainers,” and neither law abiding nor assimilable into society (Engbersen and van der Leun 2001; Heath et al 2008; Lechner 2008; Sniderman and Haagendoorn 2009). Afro-Dutch, from both former West Indian Dutch colonies and Africa, face similar stereotyping reflective of the Dutch national history of colonial relationships. The media often describes Antilleans, Surinamese, and African Dutch as criminal, lazy, uncivilized, and unclean; highlights their physicality; and refers to groups by their ancestral homelands (Awad 2013; Komen 2006; Sniderman and Haagendoorn 2009). For example, Dutch athletes of color are more likely to be described as deviant, defined by their physical characteristics and, even in the third and fourth generation, and as “Turks,” “Moroccans” or “Surinamese,” rather than “Dutch,” or “Turkish-Dutch” (Awad 2013; Knoppers and Elling 1999; Müller and Roode, 2007; van Sterkenburg and Knoppers 2012).

Racial images in The Netherlands

Racist images of Africans have long permeated popular cultural forms such as art, music, advertisements, architecture, and holiday iconography for centuries (cf. Blakely 1993; Pieterse 1990). For most of the 20th century, “tobacco, coffee, liquor, cleansers, rice farina, candy, shoe polish, metal polish, and toothpaste” (Blakely 1993, pp. 164) featured negative images of Africans on the packaging. Children today play with cards and board games, tell jokes, and eat candy featuring images of Africans as clowns and buffoons (Hondius 2009). Throughout The Netherlands, residents and tourists continue to encounter Moor’s heads on buildings, Gapers in storefronts, and Smoking Moors at tobacco shops and family and town coats of arms harkening back to the Dutch colonial past.

At the peak of the Dutch Golden Age, Dutch art, music, and literature ascribed Africans with negative characteristics communicating their unfitness for inclusion in Dutch society (Blakely 1993; Schama 1997). Hundreds of family portraits depict Blacks in servile acts, while religious paintings employ African imagery symbolizing a lack of civilization, the Hamitic legend, or blatant stereotypes of singing, dancing, and rape of White women (Blakely 1993). Contemporary art exhibits exoticize “Black beauty” using colonial tropes depicting Africans as objects to possess and dominate (Davis 2009).

Children’s textbooks and reading books contain “racist content advanced through such fundamental subjects as geography, history, and biology” (Blakely 1993, pp. 198; Mok 1999; Weiner forthcoming). Children’s books, especially dictionaries, have long equated Blackness with evil and are infused with stereotypes and scientific racism, ascribing to Black people a reeking scent, an unclean lifestyle, cannibalism, and superstitions (Blakely 1993; Kapelle and Tang 2008).

The most prominent of these images is *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete), *Sinterklaas*’s Black slave/servant/helper who wears the shoes of an enslaved page boy, speaks in a Surinamese accent, and

is ubiquitous in schools, advertising, toys, trinkets, candy, cakes, movies, and TV in the weeks leading up to Sinterklaas (Blakely 1993; Helsloot 2012; Hondius 2009; Lindsay 2008). On Sinterklaas (5 December), Saint Nicolas arrives to The Netherlands by boat, surrounded by dozens of black-faced White men and women dressed as Zwarte Piet, reminiscent of slavery when multiple enslaved Africans served a master enslaver. Although many White Dutch claim this is an “important tradition,” significant activism, both in The Netherlands and internationally, has arisen around this figure since Quinsy Gario’s arrest for wearing a self-designed “Zwarte Piet is Racism” t-shirt (with a handful of other protesters) at Sinterklaas’s 2011 arrival in Dordrecht² and has led, most recently, to a United Nations investigation into whether Zwarte Piet is racist. The most recent survey finds 91 percent of the Dutch population committed to retaining Zwarte Piet (de Hond 2013). Activism, which in 2013 included protesters appearing with taped mouths, “No Zwarte Piet” (“Zwarte Piet Niet” signs), and backs turned to Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet upon their arrival to Amsterdam, is unlikely to wane while this figure exists.

Institutionalized everyday racism

Although White Dutch eschew the word “racism,” research suggests that it persists among a considerable segment (10–50 percent) of the population, and is increasing towards Muslims (Carle 2006; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2009; Verkuyten 2008). Minorities experience institutionalized racism in the educational and occupational domains and frequent interpersonal discrimination in public places from the general public, business owners, and the police (Boog et al 2006; Crul and Doomernik 2003; Hondius 2009; Siebers 2010; van Niekerk 2007).

In segregated “Black” and “White” schools (Gramberg 1998), minority students in The Netherlands lag behind their White Dutch peers in placement in higher secondary educational tracks, high school graduation, and college attendance with opportunities distributed along racial lines and forming an ethnic queue with White Dutch students at the top, Antilleans and Surinamese in the middle, and Turks and Moroccans at the bottom (Crul 2007; Vasta 2007). In addition to textbooks excluding or distorting minority students’ histories (Weiner forthcoming) and discrimination from peers (Verkuyten and Thijs 2002), teachers subject minority students to enhanced punitive measures resulting in alienation, frustration, and correspondingly high dropout rates (Brug 2006; Crul 2007; Leeman 2007; van Ours and Veenman 2003). Teachers disproportionately recommend minority students to vocational, rather than pre-university, secondary education tracks resulting in a primarily White university population (Crul and Holdaway 2009; de Graaf and van Zenderen 2009; van de Werfhorst and van Tubergen 2007).

Racially stratified educational outcomes have profoundly impacted minorities’ social and economic opportunities, and employment-based discrimination remains ubiquitous (Bovenkerk 1978; Bovenkerk et al 1995) and across the skills spectrum (Vasta 2007), including among the highly educated (Ghorashi and van Tilburg 2006). Cultural discourses of difference facilitate employers hiring and payment of minorities less than White Dutch (Ghorashi and van Tilburg 2006; Glastra 1999; Houtzager and Rodrigues 2002) and their prominence in low-wage public sector jobs (Gowricham 2002). Once employed, minorities face isolation, exclusion, and overt and covert discrimination from colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates (Essed 2002).

Contemporary minority-related policies

The first major minority and immigrant-related policies, recommended in the 1983 Minderhedennota (Minority Report) (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken 1983), attempted

to equalize resources and opportunities and allow for collective identity maintenance and cultural retention but have instead contributed to unequal opportunities and racialization of targeted groups (De Zwart and Poppelaars 2007). Implementation of anti-discrimination laws and voluntary agreements to promote minority employment has been erratic and ineffective in facilitating minorities' socioeconomic integration (Mielants 2009; Penninx 2006). Since the 1990s, political and public perceptions of minority separatism, decreased public support for multicultural policies and welfare programs (Penninx 2006; Vasta 2007), and an increased willingness to blame inequality on immigrants rather than structural forces inhibiting their integration (Mielants 2009) have resulted in new policies placing the onus of integration on minorities (Carle 2006; de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012; Lechner 2008; Prins 2007; Vasta 2007). These policies, the Integratiebelied *Ethnische Minderheden* (Ethnic Minority Integration Policy) of 1993–1994 and the *Integratienota: Integratie, Binding, Burgerschap* (Integration Report: Integration, Commitment, Citizenship) of 2011 (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken 2011, 1994), which limit benefits and enhance punitive measures, have intensified racial stratification while simultaneously ignoring the role of racial discrimination on minority integration in a society structured by institutionally racist practices (De Zwart and Poppelars 2007; Vasta 2007).

The above research reveals that, in The Netherlands, race matters. This is true both for Whites, who have unacknowledged privileges throughout Dutch society, and people of color, who face discrimination in all realms of society which structure their opportunities and belonging. Overt and covert racism testifies to White Dutch perceptions of Surinamese, Antilleans, Turks, and Moroccans as outsiders and the significance of race in The Netherlands (Siebers 2010) resulting in minorities developing coping strategies for themselves and their children (Buijs and Hamdi, 2006; Hondius forthcoming). Since “the Dutch don't do race” (Hondius forthcoming), racism's persistence in a society where it is explicitly and overtly rejected must be sociologically reconciled. The remainder of the article will address historical racism and how these histories' excision from the national narrative has led to the widespread denial of race, racializing discourses, and practices in The Netherlands.

Roots of Dutch racism: historical colonialism

The Netherlands has a long history of immigration and racialization (Lucassen and Lucassen 2011). Internally, The Netherlands offered only ambiguous citizenship (Cain 2010) for religious and cultural outsiders and legally excluded Africans and Asians from citizenship (Hondius 2009). Externally, White Dutch engaged in genocide, oppression, and exploitation in their colonies resulting in the formation of ideologies and social structures that continue to impact all members of Dutch society today, including those in and from the former Dutch colonies of Suriname and Indonesia (Captain and Jones 2007; Jerónimo and Vink 2011). The Netherlands' centuries-long history of national exclusion of groups considered different alongside global colonialism and exploitation lay the foundation for contemporary Dutch racism.

The Netherlands' identity as a tolerant nation is rooted in historical policies offering Jews and Catholics a modicum of freedom, compared to other countries, where they faced death for practicing their religion, and their war of independence against the Spanish crown and its Inquisition. The Netherlands is particularly well-known for the story of Anne Frank, but this national history is rife with anti-Semitism. Beginning in the 1400s, The Netherlands banned Jewish settlement (punishable by flogging, branding, and death), and then, though tolerated, excluded them from guilds which relegated most to poverty in neighborhoods segregated by canals and bridges raised at sundown (Lucassen and Penninx, 1998, pp. 79; Mak, 1995).

During World War II, the occupying Nazis, with Dutch collaboration, deported more Dutch Jews for extermination, 85 percent, than any other nation besides Poland (cf. Croes 2006; Bovenkerk 2000). Catholics faced similar (in)tolerance as Protestant Dutch forced them to practice in hiding, engaged in anti-Catholic riots, tortured and murdered Catholic priests in the late 1500s, and excluded Catholics from towns and provinces (Lucassen and Penninx, 1998; Mak 1995; Parker 2008). The Roma fared worst with settlement in towns punishable by death, sanctioning of “Gypsy hunts” by financially rewarding those who “removed” Roma, dead or alive, and explicit national exclusion between 1725 and 1869. Between 1869 and the Holocaust, Roma faced criminalization, deportation, and demonization in popular cultural forms, including children’s books, as kidnappers and criminals (Bovenkerk 2000; Lucassen 1991). Together, these practices laid the foundation for contemporary internal subjugation of those not considered fully Dutch.

Of similar import for contemporary Dutch racism are The Netherlands’ overseas exploits during their “Golden Age.” Dutch representatives of the East and West Indies companies massacred and enslaved native populations in colonies from the West Indies to South Africa to Indonesia (cf. Corn, 1999; Frederickson 1981; Gomes 2003; Captain and Jones 2007; Lape 2000; Nimako and Willemsen 2011). Overseas exploitation allowed most Dutch in the metropole to profit with little direct contact with the most oppressed while simultaneously institutionalizing racialized relations between White Dutch and colonial subjects. Exploitation continued until 1949, when The Netherlands was forced to reconsider its colonial relationships. However, these histories of exclusion and oppression, particularly slavery in the West Indies and Suriname, have been largely erased from Dutch collective memory (cf. Bijl 2012; Helsloot 2012; Hira 2012; Jones 2012; Weiner forthcoming a). Instead, traditional Dutch scholars of enslavement and colonialism minimize these phenomena’s impact on their society through scientific colonialism, portraying “colonialism as a normal form of relations between human beings [rather than] a system of exploitation and oppression” (Hira 2012, pp. 53). This institutionalized practice of the social forgetting, particularly of slavery, in the Dutch national narrative (Nimako and Small 2012) represents a “willful act of forgetting” (Horton and Kardux 2005, pp. 42) and has a direct impact on contemporary Dutch conceptions of race and racism within their society.

The Netherlands, like other European nations, engages in racial Europeanization, a form of racial neoliberalism which “buries history alive” (Goldberg 2009) by dissociating historical resource accumulation and exploitation from contemporary inequality, depoliticizing the contemporary presence of non-Whites on the continent, dissociating inequalities non-Whites experience today from centuries of colonialist doctrines and practices, and blaming minorities for their individual failings to socioeconomically assimilate and thereby bringing inequality upon themselves (Araújo and Maeso 2012; Goldberg 2009; Pieterse, 1990, 1999, 2002). Unlike the British, where the State recognizes persistent racism (cf. Small and Solomos 2006), or in France, where everyone is French and so race, and racism, can neither be tracked nor identified (cf. Keaton 2010), the use of ethnicity in The Netherlands obfuscates unequal power relations rooted in The Netherlands’ colonial history and precipitating contemporary racial ideologies and inequalities. A national identity based on the belief that White Dutch are tolerant and racism-free, though replete with centuries of parallel histories and intertwined belongings between White and non-White Dutch, results in a form of historical aphasia, an inability to reconcile and integrate colonial exploitation, genocide and oppression, or contemporary failings (as in Srebrenica) into their national histories and unfinished trajectories of emancipation (Bijl 2012; Brown 2012; de Leeuw 2002; de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2011; Ghorashi 2003; Helsloot 2012; Hondius 2009; Hoving 2012; Nimako and Willemsen 2011; Wekker 2004).

The considerable research finding that race and racism are deeply embedded in contemporary Dutch society notwithstanding, persistent color-blind assertions that racism does not exist in The Netherlands except when it is by a radical (i.e. Nazi) fringe pose significant problems for anti-racist activists and sympathizers. Though minority communities in The Netherlands have long organized to challenge racial injustice, austerity measures have severely limited funds available for these efforts. And on a large scale, “there is no effective civil rights or ethnic minority movement to successfully counter this phenomena, and minority political lobbies have little effect with a parliamentary system that offers no electoral compulsion to bid for the minority vote” (Demmers and Mahendale 2010, pp. 66).

Conclusions

The Netherlands’ rejection of race must be considered alongside national and international phenomena. Internationally, World War II reconfigured racial discourse from biological to cultural racism and rearticulated the master narrative of White social, political, and economic dominance as one posing Europe’s rebirth as a function of European work ethic rather than exploitation of colonial assets (Winant 2001). However, Eurocentric ideologies placing European people, ideas, and institutions at the zenith of civilization, institutionalized during early modernity, the European Enlightenment, and the rise of capitalism privileging Whites as the supreme creators and bearers of knowledge and civilization persist through policies and political discourse promoting a racially pure and homogenous “Fortress Europe” (de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012; Goldberg 2009; Grosfoguel 2011; Hesse 2007; Melamed 2006; Mills 1999; Pieterse 2002, 1999; Quijano 2000; Wieviorka 2002). This hegemonic Eurocentric power-evasive master narrative naturalizes colonialism, exploitation, slavery, and racism in Europe’s position within the modern capitalist global economy with insufficient voices of the oppressed to overcome race and racism’s exclusion from discourses of nationhood, democracy, and citizenship (Araújo and Maeso 2012; Grosfoguel 2011).

Obscuring the racial ideologies and White privileges generated through wealth derived from historical slavery and colonialism and accumulated over multiple generations, academic trivialization of these phenomena likely contributes to the long-standing resistance to empirical engagement with “race” and thus any discussion or recognition of racism, particularly institutional racism within Dutch society (e.g. Brown 2012; Essed and Nimako 2006; Essed and Trienekens 2008; Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006; Hira 2012; Hondius forthcoming; Weiner forthcoming a; Wekker 2004). This inability to recognize historical wrongdoing of the colonial past impacts contemporary conceptions of national history, identity, and reconciliation of historic oppression with contemporary inequalities.

The near impossibility of maintaining a university position while engaging in critical scholarship (Essed and Nimako 2006) and the relative lack of faculty of color studying these issues (cf. Mullard and Willemsen, 1991; Nimako 2012) only perpetuate persistent racial denial and the ideological colonization of the Dutch metropole. Scholars in The Netherlands, and other European nations, must continue to excavate the past to consider links between historical colonialism and internal oppression and contemporary social, particularly racial, inequality. Failing to do so will not only perpetuate existing racial hierarchies and inequalities but limit understandings of The Netherlands’ unique form of racial exclusion.

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Short Biography

Melissa F. Weiner's work examines racial identity formation in the context of education, most recently in Europe. In The Netherlands, while affiliated with the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (Ercomer) at Utrecht University and the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee) in Amsterdam, she engaged in ethnographic fieldwork in a diverse Dutch primary school and collected archival data from all Dutch primary school history textbooks published since 1980. Her forthcoming research addresses racialized discourses and practices in this classroom and depictions of enslavement, Africa, and immigration in the textbooks. Weiner's publications include *Power, Protest, and the Public Schools: Jewish and African American Struggles in New York City* (Rutgers 2010), articles in *Sociology Compass*, *The DuBois Review*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Social Problems*, *The Sociological Quarterly*, and *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, and chapters in multiple edited volumes. Weiner holds a B.A. in Sociology and a B.S. in Journalism from Boston University and a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. She is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at The College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Notes

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¹ While Vuijsje (1986) has attributed this taboo to Dutch guilt over the complicity with Nazi policies towards Dutch Jews, this article will argue that the denial of racism is deeply embedded within Eurocentric conceptions of race and racism and rooted in the racial and national ideologies developed during Dutch history of colonialism, enslavement, and exploitation.

² Charges against Gario for disturbing the peace were eventually dropped, and he remains committed to removing Zwarte Piet from the Sinterklaas tradition. After filing a complaint with the Amsterdam City Council to remove Zwarte Piet from that city's Sinterklaas celebration due to its racist nature, he appeared in front of the Council with Patricia Schor. Although their request was denied and both Amsterdam's Mayor and The Netherlands' Prime Minister Mark Rutte remain in support of Zwarte Piet, activism will likely continue around this figure while it still exists in public displays.

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