



## *About Them, But Without Them*

### **Race and Ethnic Relations Studies in Dutch Universities**

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**Abstract:** On the basis of direct experience in the Dutch university system, the author analyses the ways in which knowledge about ethnic minorities—so-called “minority research”—has been hegemonized by dominant elites who view minorities as problem populations and seek to manage minority problems in such a way as to minimize them and never question their own domination nor the historical heritage of colonialism and slavery. He describes several initiatives undertaken—mainly outside the university—by minority groups to re-examine race and ethnic relations and the history of slavery and abolition, including the National Platform on the Legacy of Slavery, the National Institute for the study of Dutch slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee), and the Black Europe Summer School.

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Universities are organized to teach, research and produce knowledge. But knowledge is not produced in isolation, and knowledge about race and ethnic relations is no exception. Historically, social forces and events in Europe have given rise to policies to combat racism and racial discrimination. Among other things, racist events in Britain between 1958 and 1963 gave the United Kingdom the oldest and the most extensive anti-racism and anti-discrimination regulation in Europe (Miles

and Phizacklea 1984; Small and Solomos 2006). The British Race Relations Act of 1965 was adopted before the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination on 21 December 1965 (UN, document 27, 1965; see also UN Resolution 1904, XVIII). Anti-racism and anti-discrimination regulations entered continental Europe via the United Nations in the 1970s. The British Race Relations Act 1965 went almost unnoticed in continental Europe. In the formulation of Stuart Hall, “Western Europe did not have, until recently, any ethnicity at all. Or didn’t

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recognize it had any" (Hall 2004:256).

In continental Europe, white middle class social upsurge in the form of university student revolts in May 1968 in Paris gained significant attention. The Paris student revolts had spinoffs in Amsterdam and elsewhere, which in turn facilitated the democratisation of the universities, gender 'equality' and democratisation of life-style. The counterpart of these upsurges in relation to race and ethnic relations in the Netherlands was the uprising of the Moluccans in 1976. Formal and systematic regulation of race and ethnic relations was in response to the Moluccan uprising and took the form of the establishment of the department of minorities affairs within the Dutch Ministry of Home Affairs, which in turn culminated in the publication of the ethnic minorities' policy document or report (*Minderhedenbeleid*) of 1983; this in turn laid the foundations of formal ethnic studies within the universities.

In this paper I examine the nature and articulation of some of these processes in the Netherlands and document the small but rising body of institutional and ideological opposition to them. In this way I reveal the various knowledge production processes, the limitations of each, and the ways in which challenges are being mounted. I also reveal the ways in which international exchange, especially across programs with African Diasporic studies and other programs of critical analysis contribute to the developing patterns in Europe in general and the Netherlands in particular.

## II. SHADOWS OF FORTRESS EUROPE

Fortress Europe overshadows ethnic studies in the European Union. The proliferation of race, ethnic and immigrant studies and research in the Netherlands took off after the establishment of the department of minorities' affairs within the Ministry of

Home Affairs in the late 1970s. The active role of the government in institutionalizing research to support the development of *Minorities' Policy* is expressed in the notion of *Minorities' Research* (*Minderhedenonderzoek*). Virtually all research on ethnic minorities is funded directly by government departments or, indirectly, via (state-funded) University related institutes and professional NGOs. It is safe to assume that the majority of Dutch universities with major social science faculties conduct some studies on immigrants or ethnic minorities groups (Essed and Nimako, 2006). However the core of Dutch migration and ethnic studies are located in three centres or institutes within three universities, namely, the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER) at Utrecht University, and the Institute for Sociological and Economic Research (ISEO) at Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

The Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) is the precursor of the Centre for Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES). Established in 1984 at the University of Amsterdam by Chris Mullard, a citizen of the United Kingdom, and then Director of the Race Relations Policy and Practice Research Unit at the University of London, the Institute of Education (CRES) was the first major Centre or Institute devoted to the study of race and ethnic relations in the Netherlands. Chris Mullard was not only the first Professor of Education and Ethnic Studies in the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy and the first Director of the Centre for Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES) but also the first professor of Ethnic Studies in Europe.

The mission of CRES (1984-1991) was to develop race critical research in relation to other class, gender and other ordering principles. Chaired by a black director, Chris Mullard, staff, faculty and affiliates

consisted of a mix of different racial, ethnic and majority populations, a degree of gender and race-ethnic integration that, to date, has not found its match in another university institute in the Netherlands. In his earlier publications, prior to his arrival in the Netherlands, Chris Mullard had noted that “race as a socio-cultural category has appeared historically to be relatively independent of class” (Mullard 1980: 7). Flowing from this analysis, issues of equal opportunity, anti-racism, anti-discrimination and social mobility remained at the core of black scholarship. These insights were taken into account at CRES.

As Professor of Education and Ethnic Studies, Chris Mullard located CRES in the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy. However after the formal objections of the decision-makers of the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy to its location in the Faculty, CRES was closed down by a university board decision in 1991. A year later it was reopened and renamed IMES, with more financial resources, under a new director, Rinus Penninx. A former civil servant at the Ministry of Social Affairs and professor of Research Methodology at the Free University of Amsterdam, Penninx was appointed Professor of Migration and Ethnic Studies at the University of Amsterdam. He also chaired the production of the first report of the WRR (Scientific Council to the Government) on minorities in 1979. On its current official website however, the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies is referred to as an interdisciplinary research institute of the University of Amsterdam which has existed since 1994.

CRES was not only the first race and ethnic studies centre in the Netherlands but it was also the first institute to include both people and issues in race and ethnic studies. The closure of CRES and the emergence of IMES was not just a matter of the changing of the guard. It led to a shift of focus away from race and ethnic studies to immigration studies. This in turn followed a

state policy shift from ethnic minorities’ policy to “*aliens’ policy*.” Aliens’ policy came into effect in 1989 and classifies ‘ethnic’ groups on the basis of two categories, namely, ‘natives’ and ‘non-natives.’ Since the concept of ‘race’ is rejected in official and academic usage, ‘natives’ came to mean ‘whites.’

According to the IMES website, the research program promotes the *polder* model of encounter and—where possible—integration of different perspectives, and therefore co-operates with a range of other University of Amsterdam departments: Anthropology, Sociology, Communication Science, Political Science, Social Geography, Economic Geography, Econometrics, Administrative Law, Social and Economic History. The research program consists of the following themes: international migration; multiculturalism and integration in modern Western societies, including citizenship in multicultural democracies; history of immigration and immigrants in the Netherlands in Western European perspective; immigrants and the urban economy; structural and socio-cultural integration of immigrants in welfare states.

Other important institutes in the Netherlands include the European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER) of Utrecht University and the Institute for Sociological and Economic Research (ISEO), Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Among other things ERCOMER focuses on comparative international migration and ethnic relations within a European context, whereas ISEO monitors social inequality in education and the labour market in relation to ethnic minorities for the state. What stands out in this mode of research is the use of the insider-outsider paradigm—‘us versus them’—as the starting point. The ‘us’ represents ‘white’ Europeans; the ‘them’ represents the ‘Other.’ In other words the researchers consider themselves as insiders and their object of research, namely, the

migrants and ethnic minorities, as outsiders. The implication of this mode of operation is that the 'us' has become the consumers of their own knowledge production. The objects (i.e., 'them') of research are hardly interested in the knowledge production of the subjects (i.e., 'us').

### III. PARALLEL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTIONS

The closure of CRES prevented the institutionalization of anti-racism education and research within universities, but it does not mean that those interested in race and ethnic relations research have not moved on outside the universities. It is worth noting that Chris Mullard coined the term "Black Britain" in his book of the same title in 1973. Contrary to the debate on immigration in Britain then prevalent in the 1960s, 'Black Britain' reminded us that a new generation of Black Europeans had come of age; namely, those who were born in Britain, and for that matter in Europe, who knew no other country than the countries in which they were born (see details in Small, 1983). In turn Stuart Hall (1978) drew our attention to a new culture that was unfolding as a consequence of these developments. This constituted parallel knowledge productions. As we shall note below, it took about three decades before the notion of Black Europe appeared on the public agenda.

In the Dutch context, official minorities' policy (1983-1989) was accompanied by budgetary support for ethnic specific welfare organizations. Some of these welfare organizations became the main source of employment for some blacks. The change from minorities' policy (*minderhedenbeleid*, 1983) to aliens' policy (*allochtonenbeleid*, 1989) went hand in hand with the withdrawal of state funding for welfare organizations and the breakdown of those organizations. Parallel to these develop-

ments were the rise of claims by predominantly Dutch people of Surinamese and Antillean origin for attention to slavery and historic injustice, and the absence of this part of Dutch history in Dutch schoolbooks. These claims gave rise to social movements that culminated in the emergence of the National Institute for the study of Dutch slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee), which was founded in 2003 and began operations in 2004.

The emergence of NiNsee may be seen as a progressive step forward, but it actually paralleled developments in the frame of education that are relevant to this discussion. The establishment of an institute that would serve to document and discuss the legacy of slavery and commemorate the victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery would arise only at the insistence and thanks to the petitioning of the Afro-Surinamese community in the Netherlands. To understand why this is the case, one must first understand the national self-consciousness of the Dutch with regard to their involvement in slavery and the slave trade. For a long time in the Netherlands, it was taken for granted that the Atlantic 'slave' trade and slavery took place long ago in some distant countries—Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas. The Dutch did not see the numerous ways in which Dutch society at home—in economics, politics, cultural, museums, ideologies—was implicated in slavery and shaped by it. With the mass migration from the former plantation colony of Surinam that took place when that country gained independence in 1975, the legacy of slavery was literally delivered to the Netherlands' front door. The migrant population included thousands of descendants of enslaved people. This Afro-Dutch community was the seed-bed for the development of organisations in the major cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague that organised events on the first of July with the primary objective of commemorating the legacy of

slavery and celebrate its abolition.

In 1998, the Afro-European Women's organization Sophiedela created plans for a national monument. Sophiedela presented a petition to the Lower House. The petition, entitled *Sporen van slavernij* (Traces of Slavery), requested the building of a national monument to commemorate the Dutch slavery legacy. This petition was discussed in the House in February 1999. Since that time, first of July committees have been established in other major cities, such as Rotterdam. The annual *Bigi Spikri* ('big mirror') parade, where the descendants of enslaved people parade past shop windows (mirrors) in traditional costumes in order to display their beauty, always attracts thousands of visitors. On the first of July 1999, the Rotterdam committee presented a petition to the municipal council requesting that it use its influence in the Cabinet to declare 1 July a national holiday.

The many initiatives at the grass-roots level went into high gear when the Cabinet granted the request in the Sophiedela petition and the new Minister for Integration, Roger van Boxtel, adopted the idea of a national slavery monument and made it a spearhead of his policy geared to the promotion of the social integration of ethnic minorities. The various Afro-Surinamese, Antillean, Aruban and African organisations and organisations of Maroons and Indigenous peoples joined forces at the insistence of the Ministry of the Interior. This umbrella organisation—the *Landelijk Platform Slavernijverleden* (LPS, National Platform on the Legacy of Slavery)—then consulted with the government during the process.

The developments in the Netherlands relating to the slavery legacy ran parallel with international initiatives to combat repression and exclusion, including the World Anti-Racism Conference held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. At that conference, the then Minister for Integration Van Boxtel spoke on behalf of the

Dutch Cabinet on the approach to the struggle against racism and racial discrimination.

It was only due to the efforts of the Black community in the Netherlands that the Dutch slave legacy was placed on the political agenda. This brought the discourse on the legacy of slavery into the public domain and simultaneously gave it an emotional charge. Once in the public domain, this movement culminated in the unveiling of the *Nationaal Monument Slavernijverleden* (National Monument to the Legacy of Slavery) on 1 July 2002 in the Oosterpark in Amsterdam. This static monument was unveiled in the presence of Queen Beatrix.

Let us continue this narrative with two observations. First, the Minister made this statement without support from major mainstream Dutch public intellectuals—there was by no means a general political or academic shift in the views on slavery and racism. At that time, dominant public intellectuals were preoccupied with issues of multiculturalism and Islam. Meanwhile, black academics and intellectuals started going outside the university system to design their own programmes, conferences and networks.

With financial support from Volkswagen, Peggy Piesche and her friends and colleagues took the initiative to develop a Black European Studies (BEST) Network, at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität in Mainz, Germany. This led to a series of international conferences in Germany between 2003 and 2006. Some of the top scholars of race and ethnic relations, including scholars that focused directly on gender, from across Europe, were involved in these conferences. There were also very significant contributions from scholars of race and ethnic relations based in the USA. The BEST initiatives, financed by Volkswagen, were not institutionalized after funds dried up. However, many of the scholars, on both sides of the Atlantic, continue to



carry out research and publish on these topics (see, for example, Hine, Keaton and Small, 2009).

Running parallel to the initiative of BEST was the 'Racial Configuration in post-9/11 era' workshops organised by Ramón Grosfoguel and his colleagues at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris in June 2004 and June 2005. In April 2006 Darlene Clark Hine and Trica Danielle Keaton organised a conference on 'Black Europe and the African Diaspora' held at Northwestern University (USA). What these conferences, workshops and summer school have in common is the production of knowledge that is uncommon in mainstream European universities, namely, knowledge production that challenges the parameters, epistemologies and methodologies of research being carried out within the university frameworks, and that challenges the limitations prescribed for research that is funded by the state. It also involved significant commitments to anti-racist education. These developments culminated in the organisation of the first international Black Europe Summer School in Amsterdam in June 2008, initiated and founded by Kwame Nimako and Amy Abdou.

The organizers of this programme had originally approached the University of Amsterdam, home of the IMES, for support for the programme and an academic anchor. This was in concert with other summer programmes that were developed through the International School for Humanities and Social Sciences, a division of the University of Amsterdam. The programme was rejected for its emphasis on race, as opposed to immigration, and for its critical nature. At one juncture, the then Dean of the International School suggested that it would be more feasible to establish a programme that examined the role of Islam in the current debate over immigration. Such a suggestion should not be understood in isolation. It forms part of what I

call frontier social science, which refers to a particular research tradition that follows official policy of progressive control, of which more below. The Summer School on Black Europe is an intensive summer programme that takes place in the Netherlands each year and seeks to address the dimensions of race and ethnic relations that are unique to Europe. The programme examines the ways in which conceptions of the *iotheri* are institutionalized and reproduced; the rise of xenophobia in various EU countries; the legal definitions and discourse surrounding the conceptualized *iotheri*; and the ways in which each country has dealt with issues of race and national identity. The programme engages in international comparison and provides an historical overview of the developments within a variety of European countries via case studies and an analysis of anti-discrimination laws. In this sense, the Netherlands provides an interesting setting for a discussion of the disparity between anti-discrimination law and the philosophy behind critical race studies.

As we noted above, the formal and systematic regulation of race and ethnic relations was adopted in response to the Moluccan uprising; not only did this culminate in official ethnic minorities policy but it also laid the foundations of formal ethnic studies within the universities. The point of departure of formal ethnic studies is the identification of the object of study as 'problem. In response to these so-called 'problem group,' social science researchers assigned to study the groups shift their focus to new frontiers. Thus, the Moluccan 'problem' was superseded by the 'Sri-naese problem,' followed by the 'Antillean problem' and the 'Moroccan problem,' as determined by major state agencies. After 11 September 2001, Islam became the new frontier on research on immigration and ethnicity. It was against this backdrop that it was suggested to us to 'follow the research money,' because policy priority

and the allocation of resources favoured the study of Islamic groups. This also constitutes Progressive Control, a dynamic process which, observed in and endorsed by policies, practices, official statements and the like, is oriented and continuously moves towards *newer forms of control* which, in turn, are called for as a result of changes in the material and structural conditions, consciousnesses and resistances that distinguish the character of a Europeanized society at any given time (Mullard, Nimako and Willemsen, 1990).

While it refused to affiliate itself with the programme officially, the University of Amsterdam took the position that if the organizers were capable of funding the programme externally and locating an academic anchor outside the university, they would be willing to rent classroom space and student housing to the organizers. Thus the programme was established in 2008 through the financial and institutional support of NiNsee.

After the first year, the programme was then taken over by the National Institute for the study of Dutch slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee). The Vrije Universiteit (VU) became the academic anchor, although the VU does not contribute to the financing of the programme. The Black Europe Summer School received its third group of students and scholars in June 2010. This programme was enhanced by the development of the Black European Research Network, a collective of researchers, professionals and practitioners in the field of Black European Studies that was developed in conjunction with the yearly meetings in Amsterdam.

In addition, NiNsee has since established an annual symposium on Trajectories of Emancipation and it collaborates with the *Center for Global Studies and Humanities* (CGSH, Duke University), the *Institute for Postcolonial and Transcultural Studies* (INPUTS, University of Bremen) in organizing an annual series of symposia. A

series of these meetings has already taken place, both in the Netherlands and in the USA. The next meeting will take place in Germany in 2011.

Finally it should be mentioned that parallel knowledge production has a long tradition and is tied to knowledge production itself. In recent years intellectuals and academics who found no place within the mainstream universities have gone their way to form alternative institutes such as the Transnational Institute (TNI) based in Amsterdam; they have also developed forms of knowledge production and set up alternative publishing outlets such as the Monthly Review Press, Pluto Press, *New Left Review*, *Race and Class* and *Review*.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION: FROM RACE RELATIONS TO BLACK EUROPEAN STUDIES?**

The politics of research on race and ethnic relations in the Netherlands have been more or less similar to developments in other (Western) countries: competition between oppositional and mainstream paradigms, between *critical race research* (which in this context focus on de- and neo-colonization, race, racism, intertwined systems of domination, transnationalism, diversity) and what has come to be called in the Netherlands *minority research* (in this context focusing on ethnicity, migration, assimilation, integration, multiculturalism, transnationalism and diversity). The two directions are not completely mutually exclusive; there is some overlap where oppositional paradigms meet the critical end of mainstream research, notably in the advocacy of transnationalism and (cultural) diversity (Essed and Nimako, 2006).

Traditionally, however, race relations research in Europe has been about white Europeans studying and representing Black Europeans. This is no exception in

Dutch universities. This is problematic for both political and intellectual reasons. On the one hand, politically this mode of knowledge production is also power projection. On the other hand, academically it is a (mis)representation of the 'other' Both tend to be rejected or invalidated by blacks. The emphasis on immigration studies, the exclusion of Black Europeans from academia amid a significant Black presence, has given rise to the emergence of Black European studies outside the universities. In the US Black studies take place in universities; in Europe, Black studies operate in the shadows of Fortress Europe.

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