
Introduction or on the danger of “acting normal”

Nana Adusei-Poku

On Monday the 23rd of January the Dutch Prime Minister published in anticipation of the upcoming election, a public letter in all major dutch newspapers. In this letter aiming at the “silent majority” Rutte opens with the sentence, that “there is something wrong with our land” and asks citizen’s to “act normal” and protect Dutch values or to otherwise “leave”. The Netherlands is a very cool and prosperous country, he states, which does not tolerate anti-social behavior. Amongst which he lists, acts such as spitting on conductors, harassing Gay men, lifting up Women’s skirts and calling “ordinary Dutch people racist”. ([RUTTE 2017](#))

This letter can neither be read as detached from the right wing, or let’s simply call it (global) fascist populist movement around Geert Wilders, nor from the rising Islamic- and xenophobia in this country. Whilst his call for non-violent and respectful behavior may appear as a reasonable claim, the question remains “what is normal” and “who” is he really talking about?

The vilification of young men of Turkish and Moroccan descent in the Dutch media, is picked upon in this letter and hence directly connected to the fear of “foreigners” and Islamicisation or “Radicalization” by the 6% of Muslims ([INSTITUTE FOR MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS 2010](#)) living in The Netherlands. Rutte eloquently manages to make these statements through a passive aggressive tone, by not-naming Turkish and Moroccan communities, who he —“collectively”— wants to defend the Dutch values against. This defence is highly sexist as the main perpetra-

continue reading on p.2

WDKA MAKES A DIFFERENCE READER 2017

1

WDKA MAKES
A DIFFERENCE
READER 2017

TABLE OF CONTENT

05–14

TEANA BOSTON-MAMMAH

THE ENTRANCE GAP

A Study Of Admissions Procedures At
The Willem De Kooning Academy

15—20

JAN VAN HEEMST

SECULARISM MATTERS

European Muslims and
European Politics

21—26

ESMA MOUKHTAR

SAFE IS A PLACE

On Coming Closer
In A Classroom

27–30

NANA ADUSEI-POKU

Everyone Has To Learn Everything Or

ON EMOTIONAL LABOR

continued from page 1

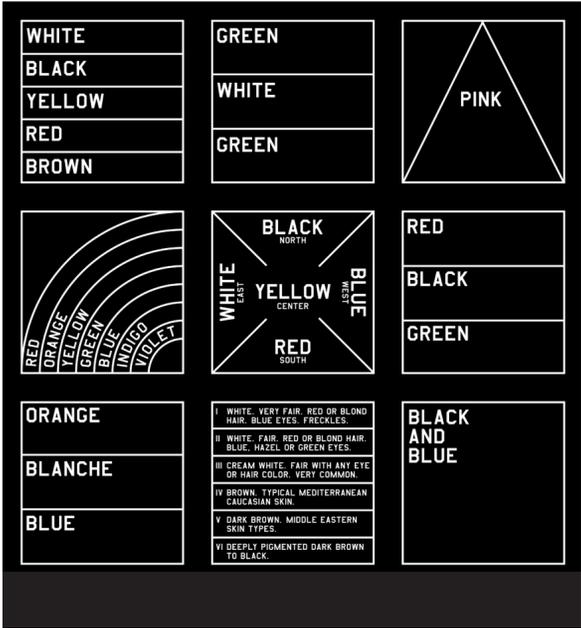
tors of aggression against the Dutch value system are constantly named as CIS Muslim men, which points towards a hetero-patriarchal conflict. By this, I mean that the duality with which Muslim men are the aggressors from whom Muslim, as well as Christian Women as well as white Gay men, have to be saved from is a common European narrative. ^(DIETZE 2000) To “act normal” and protect Dutch values conclusively includes being openly xenophobic, sexist, populist and ignorant of the long history of Dutch racism and colonialism. But to write this would also offend the Prime Ministers view that “ordinary Dutch people are racist”, which is another aspect of this letter, that remains questionable. It seems that racists are exceptional individuals and the rest are innocent. The misunderstanding here of racism as simply a curse word is dismissive of the systemic racist structures on which the Dutch (global) ideological system is based and moreover that racism is not connected to privileges and prejudices from one group against another. My emphasis here lies on privilege as it is a defining factor whether a group can maintain and structurally create forms of exclusion and exploitation. Because a White person, who is affected by homophobia, classism or ageism does not necessarily lose their racial privilege when it comes to finding work, housing or access to healthcare. Their actions, however, can have a massive effect on the lives of people of color.

The Dutch idea of Norms and Values (*Normen and Waarden*), which is deeply rooted in the Dutch Cultural Archive ^(WEKKER 2016, SAID 1993) are held high, but in times in which being right wing, xenophobic and racist has become the new norm this letter is not only alarming but a call to not remain silent and take action.

At the beginning of the academic year, September 2016 the HR published a short essay called **Samen Leven in de Samenleving** co-authored by Ron Bormans and Izaak Dekker. In this text Bormans and Dekker try to establish the University of Applied Sciences as a “Village” within a City as a kind of intermediary space with rules, or in other words with Norms and Values. The introduction starts with a nostalgic glance to the past when going to primary school was marked by small scalenes and “many dialects”. Which creates a homogenised picture of who went to this school, other languages are not part of this reminiscing narrative, which hence already emphasizes (again without naming) the fact that the Dutch demography is not homogenically White Dutch anymore. It cannot go unnoticed, that Dekker and Bormans chose amongst the first three “Thinkers” to uncritically cite the politician Pim Fortuyn. A person, whose hate speeches against Islam and Muslims had a divisive dominating presence in the Dutch discourse in the late 1990’s early 2000’s. The sentiment, which he expressed in his book **Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur**, despite distancing himself from Geert Wilders, is echoed in the contemporary populist movement. Fortuyn stands out as one of the main resources for the explorations on diversity and values throughout the publication, with his main argument, which is embedded in Judeo-Christian belief system, that Dutch culture is missing a common value system to strengthen the society and hold it together. ^(BORMANS AND DEKKER 2016, 25) This post-modern dystopia of the fragmented “superdi-

verse” society is a recurring theme in the essay. The “fragmentation and variety” they suggest in this publication leads to violence, which is why it is important to have a core identity and value system as an institution that holds people together, borrowing these conclusions from the clinical Psychologist Paul Verhaeghe ^(BORMANS AND DEKKER 2016, 27). The notion of violence is not further elaborated at this point, but given that the College van Bestuur sent an email to all Hogeschool employees in 2014 warning against “radicalization in the classroom” the notion of violence can hence also be read as a synonym for the development of the radicalization of students with Muslim beliefs. I will not go further into detail how the term radicalization has become synonymous with Islam, but want to point out that i.e. the use of Pim Fortuyn is within itself a radical positioning in a context that claims to be intolerant towards “any kind of radicalization” and discrimination on the basis of i.e. religious beliefs.

“Individual freedom, rationality and autonomy” are at the core of the liberal value system, which Bormans and Dekker propose ^(BORMANS AND DEKKER 2016, 43); values that find no further elaboration nor critical discussion. At the same time, these core values are equated with a “modern society”, because in Dekker and Bormans view these values are under threat by Muslim Societies or Communities, that are *“struggling with Modernity”* ^(BORMANS AND DEKKER 2016, 47–48). It is difficult to read such explorations without seeing a pattern being reproduced, which can also be a found in Rutte’s open letter. Although, Bormans and Dekker are more explicit when it comes to their view on Islam, which they secure by quoting a theorist, who belongs to the Muslim community itself. I am emphasizing the strategic use of Muslim theorists in this publication because, in the same way in which Black people who are pro Zwarte Piet are utilized in public conversations in order to justify the legitimacy of the racist tradition, Bormans and Dekker instrumentalize Muslim theorists in the same way.



Artwork for a totebag to promote Cultural Diversity to students of Willem de Kooning Academy Design by Mark Mulder (Studio for Visual Pop.Culture), 2014

Whilst rejecting a centralized model of strict government within the school, the core question that the authors ask is how to create plurality within an institution or as a “superdiverse” and open institution on the basis of Norms ^(BORMANS AND DEKKER 2016, 30–31). Superdiversity here, as I have established in the publication, **Stake in the Unknown** is a way of talking about “Diversity” without addressing the core issues of White hegemony. In other words, the problem is that Superdiversity tries to address the multiplicity and complexity of Diversity, which is composed of a plethora of different socio-political and historical shifts, that are manifested in the hybridity of our various identities, without a critique of White Privilege and Hegemony. So the core of my critique is that, a thorough engagement with the epistemological and ontological violence that are constantly reproduced through Eurocentric Hegemony remains unquestioned, which is why Superdiversity is another term to cloak the power structures that create systemic exclusion.

Despite the fact that Bormans and Dekker only implicitly ask students to act within the confines of the school’s value system, these actions are within the idea of Norms and Normativity and can equally be considered as “normal” actions. Which embeds the essay within a national discourse that makes populist ideas accepted as the Norm.

THE STRUGGLE WITH MODERNITY

It may come as a surprise that I start the introduction to this publication with a discussion of the internal as well as external conversations about the rise of Xenophobia and Islamophobia in this country. But as I have stated before, this is not a time to remain silent. The struggle with Modernity and here I am referring to the enlightenment project from which the liberal value system referred to by Bormans and Dekker, is one, which has been part of the post-colonial critique for decades. I don’t have to mention that apart from the instrumentalization of Muslim voices in the publication any other epistemologies deriving from marginalized voices are missing, but I will return to this point.

The post-colonial theorist Nikita Dhawan poignantly emphasizes my critique in her introduction of her book **Decolonizing enlightenment**, in which she writes

“Emancipatory movements for suffrage, abolition of slavery and civil liberties can all be traced back to the Enlightenment, even as it continues to inspire contemporary social and political movements. The Enlightenment idea of individual rights and dignity, it is believed, enables the exercise of political agency and expands individual freedom. However, as has been pointed out by both scholars of Postcolonial Studies as well as Holocaust Studies, Enlightenment’s promise of attaining freedom through the exercise of reason has ironically resulted in domination by reason itself. Along with progress and emancipation, it has brought colonialism, slavery, genocide, and crimes against humanity.” ^(DHAWAN 2014, 9)

So the question is, if a truly inclusive institution can uncritically build on the legacy of an epistemological project (which is always in the making) which in and of itself is highly exclusionary or if a decolonial approach should be in place? In the introduction to the essay Borman states that he saw the “liberation of the Maagdenhuis” at the University Amsterdam as “one sided”. The liberation that was initiated by students of color, who want their learning environment reformed into a decolonial institution is a demand,

“FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE” — ANGELA DAVIS

which derives from the same critique as I have just presented. This means that the epistemic violence that is reproduced through the methods and content within the school has been addressed and criticized. A critique which is from the beginning in the essay by Borman dismissed.

The conversation that we have to have is one that goes to the core of the critique of prevailing colonial paradigms, to the heart of our individual historically formed identities and their relationships to each other, as well as aims to destroy White Hegemony.

WdKA makes a Difference was from the outset a project that was interested in looking into the ways in which White Hegemony has prevailed within the Willem de Kooning Academy. Although

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the language when I started this project was more centered around the discourse of in- and exclusion ^(ADUSEI-POKU 2015, 23–24), the project has shifted due to its design into a stronger investigation into Difference and the role Difference plays in the classroom as well as the intake of students. The distribution of critical knowledge from postcolonial, gender-queer theory, critical race as well as Black Studies within the WdKA to push the boundaries of normativity and initiate decolonial thinking has been the main angle of this project. Although widely unnoticed —because not under the banner WdKA makes a Difference— this project has influenced the art-school in a sustainable way, through the development of the **Minor+ Visual Culture**, an Elective (*Keuzevak*) **Make a Difference**, Thematic Projects in the MFA program, multiple guest lectures in various seminars, an exhibition collaboration with Witte de With as well as Film Screenings and talks.

The team which consisted of various numbers ranging from 1-7, depending on already scarce resources, engaged in monthly readings on subjects such as Inclusive Pedagogy, Critical Whiteness and Decolonial Art Education.

The artist **Patricia Kaersehout** held a performative workshop in 2015 and we arranged a Theater of the Oppressed workshop at **Formaat, Workplace for Participative Theater** in Rotterdam in 2016, which deepened and formed the critical understanding of this group. Our conversations, learning from each other and sharing experiences have informed this publication and its themes, but it has also informed my understanding that social change is relational, by which I mean that without this team, who have been willing to engage with uncomfortable questions this project would not have been realized.

I would therefore like to thank everybody who has been involved in this project: Eva Visser, Liane van der Linden, Teana Boston-Mammah, Rudi Enny, Jan van Heemst, Reinaart Vanhoe, Marleen van Aarendonk, Remko van de Pluijm and Mark Mulder as well as the many students and colleagues who we have been in conversation with. But a project like this, which received no external funding would not have been possible without the support of it’s home base the Research Center Creating 010. It would be a misunderstanding to consider our work as finished and I would, therefore, like to end with a reference to Angela Davis: “Freedom is a constant struggle”. ●

2

NANA ADUSEI-POKU INTRODUCTION OR ON THE DANGER OF ‘ACTING NORMAL’

3

WDKA MAKES A DIFFERENCE READER 2017

COLOPHON

Research Project *WdKA makes a Difference*
WdKA makes a Difference is an action based research project interested in the possibilities of decolonial approaches within the Willem de Kooning Academy, which was conducted from January 2015 till December 2016.

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR WDKA MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Applied Research Professor Nana Adusei-Poku
CO-RESEARCHERS

Teana Boston-Mammah, Jan van Heemst
CONTRIBUTORS

Marleen van Arendonk, Rudi Enny, Esma Moukhtar, Mark Mulder, Remko van de Pluijm, Reinaart Vanhoo

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SUPERVISING EDITOR

Nana Adusei-Poku

COPYEDITS

Jareh Das

AUTHORS

Nana Adusei-Poku, Teana Boston-Mammah, Jan van Heemst, Esma Moukhtar

DESIGN

Mark Mulder, Studio for Visual Pop.Culture

***WdKA makes a Difference* WEBSITE**

VISIT

www.wdkamakesadifference.com

DESIGN

Mark Mulder, Studio for Visual Pop.Culture

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VISITING ADDRESS

Wijnhaven 103
3011 WN Rotterdam

MAILING ADDRESS

PO Box 25035
3001 HA Rotterdam

ONLINE

T +31 (0)10 794 55 14
E creating010@hr.nl
www.creating010.com
www.wdka.nl
www.hr.nl

AUTHORS



TEANA BOSTON-MAMMAH is a sociologist, she earned a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology at Essex University (UK) and a Master of Urban Studies and Public Policy at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. She is particularly interested in notions of identity in an urban context. The first ten years of her career she worked as a teacher of sociology in London. In the Netherlands, she went on to develop her research and policy advising skills. She worked for over eleven years as a policy advisor / researcher for Scala, a non-profit expertise center for gender and diversity, in Rotterdam. Research areas include: the glass ceiling, emancipation in Rotterdam, radicalisation, fatherhood, sexual diversity and gendered social contacts patterns. From 2012 she has worked as a consultant and researcher for various organisations in Rotterdam, Forma, Het Peutercollege and the research center Creating 010. In her free time Teana organises, as co-founder of the foundation RotterdamINK, various events, in the context of women’s empowerment issues. Teana is a board member of various nonprofits. Her research on gender and social contact theory in a neighbourhood in South Rotterdam is via Emerald publishers accessible and called “Women and the Gender Gap”.



ESMA MOUKHTAR studied philosophy at the UvA in Amsterdam. Since then she has worked for several magazines and has written, mostly about art and film, for various publications, catalogues and other media. From 2002 on she has lectured art history, theory and philosophy at the Koninklijke Academie voor Kunst en Vormgeving Den Bosch, the Willem de Kooning Academy, the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, and at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam. She has worked a lot with students on thesis research as well, and still does. At the Willem de Kooning Academy she is involved in the Critical Studies minor, teaching critical theory and has developed a series of Read-Ins that focus on the troubles, theories and politics of identity from feminist and postcolonial perspectives. Recently she started a course for a group of fine arts students on creative writing about their work. In her spare time she is working on a novel, and is an editor for Perdu, a foundation for poetry, literature, art, and performance in Amsterdam, where she also lives.



NANA ADUSEI-POKU is Research Professor in Visual Culture at Rotterdam University and Guest Lecturer in Media Arts and Master Fine Arts at the University of the Arts, Zurich. She received her PhD from Humboldt University Berlin for her thesis on post-black art , following degrees in African studies and gender studies at Humboldt University, and in media and communications at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She has been a visiting scholar at the University of Ghana, Legon; the London School of Economics; and Columbia University, New York. She most recently published: “Post-Post-Black?” In Nka-Journal for Contemporary African Art and Catch me if you can! which is a critical reflection on the state of Diversity and Decolonisation in the Arts and Art education . Also available is the visual essay “So it is better to speak remembering we were never ment to survive”, which discusses and explores Black Queer Ontologies in the Dutch Journal for Gender Studies.



JAN VAN HEEMST, here featuring on a student’s t-shirt, is Senior Research Lecturer at the Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences. He completed his PhD in the Humanities, University of Amsterdam. His research centres on Cultural Analysis. What drives him in particular is an analytical interest in the resilience of cultural belongings in our plainly not so post-identitarian twenty-first century world. He is presently addressing the most hotly debated issues of cultural belongings in an exploration of historical configurations and actual representations that make for what appear to be collective commitments to often highly contested causes like class, race, nationality, nativity, ethnicity, gender, or, for that matter, religion. Findings will be set forth in a critical manual for advanced BA-students. They will offer major cases for ‘teachable moments’ in higher vocational and/or academic education, i.e. issues that are indisputable relevant for next decade curricula, as they appertain to sensitive topics such as migration, diaspora, tolerance, selfhood, rights, agency, and diversity. Recently Jan van Heemst published a concise History of European Culture (Dutch, Rotterdam, Ad. Donker Publishers, 2012).

The Entrance Gap A Study Of Admissions Procedures At The Willem De Kooning Academy

Teana Boston-Mammah

Interviewer: “Do you think the student population is going to change in the coming 10 to 20 years?”

Respondent: “Well, yes, so long as the population does not become what you see on the streets of Rotterdam though” (Interviewee C)²

TEANA BOSTON-MAMMAH

THE ENTRANCE GAP

A STUDY OF ADMISSIONS PROCEDURES AT THE WILLEM DE KOONING ACADEMY

Reflected in this interview segment is a clear outline of an attitude which privileges the habitus, subjectivities and cultural and linguistic capital of ‘traditional’ students already at the academy contrasted negatively with those who do not. Further raising much curiosity about who is on the streets of Rotterdam. In the light of this attitude, Pierre Bourdieu’s criticism of the sector of cultural production comes to mind: “Although they do not create or cause class divisions and inequalities, ‘art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences’ and thus contribute to the process of social reproduction.” (BOURDIEU 1993, 2)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The development of this essay relies heavily on two of Bourdieu’s central themes: habitus and field. Habitus in the sense of “a set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions... the result of a long process of inculcation” (1993, 5). Cultural capital embodies the inculcation of aesthetic codes, practices and dispositions transmitted to children through the process of family socialisation, habitus. Habitus is an important form of cultural inheritance, reflecting class position or the subject’s location in a variety of fields and is geared to the perpetuation of structures of dominance (BOURDIEU AND PASSERON, 1977, 204-5).

Field, alongside habitus and capital, are used to make sense of the social world which Bourdieu formulates as a space with several dimensions. It is within these dimensions that differentiations occur that confer strength and power to those within. A distinguishing feature of cultural capital is the socialization which is thus an ongoing process of transference, leading to the generation of practices across a range of areas. Thereby accounting for the similarity in the habitus of those from the same social class and I would add ethnic and or racial background.³ As educational sociologist Wallace (2016) asserts,

“despite the fact that Bourdieu’s work has not consistently addressed ‘race’ and ethnicity, his theoretical concepts have long been used to interpret the experiences and outcomes of racial, ethnic and class minorities” (2016, 38).

Inequality and education researcher Prudence Carter in **Keepin’ It Real** (2005), expanding on Bourdieu’s underdeveloped accounting of the intersection of race, ethnicity and class underscores the fact that conventional interpretations of cultural capital ignore non-dominant forms of cultural capital. Carter’s ethnographic study of low-income African American and Latino youth gives insight into their valuable and abounding desirable resources, which afford them recognition and power within their local social contexts (CARTER 2005). Taking Carter’s ideas forward to the Dutch situation, it will be interesting to register if these non-dominant forms of cultural capital are at all present in the academy. Diversity in organisations specialist Machteld De Jong⁵ (2014), applied Bourdieu’s concept of field and habitus to study the social relations between teachers, staff and BME students.

With respect to field, positions are relationally determined, which also means by what they are and what they are not vis-à-vis other positions. For example, Bourdieu often categorised the field of cultural production as the ‘economic world in reverse’, in that its logic is driven in part by a rejection of the capitalist mode of production in the economic field (BOURDIEU 1993A). A field is a duality consisting of a structured space of positions and position-takings, accordingly Ferrare and Appel (2014) emphasise, that

“Bourdieu constructed his version of field theory in a dual sense in which social actors experience fields as both arenas of force and arenas of struggle. In the former sense, fields are constituted by rules that direct normative values,

5

WDKA MAKES
A DIFFERENCE
READER 2017

- 1 This preliminary research *Making Differences* (2011) was conducted by the Institute for Art Education (Zurich University) to gain a first understanding of inequality in the field of Higher Art Education and to assess possibilities of impacting on current practices within art schools. It was conducted at three art schools in Zurich, Bern and Geneva entailing a survey among candidates who had applied and were in the admissions process (700 respondents), and 19 qualitative interviews with heads of Bachelor degree courses.
- 2 Unless otherwise stated all quotations have been translated from Dutch by the author
- 3 Bourdieu’s work does not deal with race/ethnic categorizations focusing primarily on class, however several scholars have attempted to integrate this aspect into his works, see Hall in Tzanakis (2011), Wallace (2016), Kalmijn & Kraaykamp (1996).
- 4 Rollock 2007, Reay et al 2005, Reay 2004, Carter 2003
- 5 *Diversity in higher education* (2014)

regulate actions, reward ontological complicity, and place sanctions on transgressors. Sometimes these rules are explicit, such as the requirements for obtaining a bachelor’s degree at a given institution, whereas in other situations the rules are tacit.” (2014, 48)

In Wallace’s work on Black cultural capital among middle class and working class Black Caribbean teenagers, he notes however that within the field of a local secondary school in London, this capital “does not necessarily inspire an oppositional stance to white, middle-class authority and academic achievement” (WALLACE 2016, 41). Bourdieu’s concept of field is a useful way to analyse a social setting, such as a higher educational art school⁶, that is governed by a set of objective social relations. Within this field two forms of capital⁷ can be identified: symbolic and cultural, the former pertaining to the amount of prestige and recognition can be/ is accumulated, in this case, the WdKA in competition with other art schools in The Netherlands. The WdKA itself, within this body of knowledge, reflects forms of cultural knowledge, competences and or dispositions, the following quote makes explicit what they are.

“I ask them to show me their best work, what the idea behind it is, their concept. I always ask them what they think of the sector in which they want to work and what they don’t like about it. I want to know if they keep up to date with developments in their field and how they do this. Additionally, I find it important to know if they do or don’t read, what kind of music they listen to, what films they like, what museums they have visited. I try to find out what their world is and what their drivers are.” (Interviewee G)

In her latest work **White Innocent** (2016), the Dutch race and gender theorist Gloria Wekker argues that all things considered, it is within field that habitus becomes practice, it is where we lose consciousness of the terms under which we operate, because their very success negates our experience of them as learned structures of engagement. Hall, in **The Spectacle of the ‘Other’** (2013), expounds on fetishism as an aspect of representing the other in a similar vein, forcing us to contend not only with what is visible but also with what is not. Fetishism in representation involves displacement, so in following the theme of this article, who cannot enter the academy cannot be represented because it is a taboo instead we focus on something else, which is seen as a desirable integral part of the academy, such as successful inculcation of art & design knowledge and cultural competencies (2013, 256). In other words, habitus is “history turned into nature” (BOURDIEU, 1977 CITED IN WEKKER, 2016, 12)⁸. Wekker’s concern, which allows me to embrace another aspect of this enquiry, to which I shall return later on in this work, is how

“an unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and affects based on four hundred years of Dutch imperial rule plays a vital but unacknowledged part in dominant meaning-making processes, including the making of the self, taking place in Dutch society.” (2016, 2).

This embrace affirms the need to critically assess which subjectivities over the four hundred years are naturally felt to reflect particular forms of cultural knowledge and accompanying competen-

6	The Willem de Kooning Academy is one of 14 higher educational institutes within the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, Rotterdam.
7	Capital can present itself in 3 fundamental forms: economic, cultural & social. Economic capital refers to income and other financial resources and assets. However economic capital is not sufficient to buy statuses or position, it relies on the interaction with other forms of capital. Two other such forms are; cultural capital & social capital. Cultural capital is the form of capital closely linked to the institutionalization of educational qualifications and the achievement gap (Bourdieu, <i>Forms of Capital</i> 1986).
8	Wekker conceptualizes the cultural archive with reference to Bourdieu’s notion of habitus (Wekker, 2016, 2).
9	http://fae.zhdk.ch/fileadmin/data/fae/documents/Making_Differences_Vorstudie.pdf
10	http://creating010.com/welcome-to-kenniscentrum-creating010/
11	https://www.zhdk.ch/suche?q=Nana%20Adusei%20Poku
12	Statistics from the WdKA’s own databank show that in 2016, of the 1.908 students 71% are classified as ‘autochtone’, 17% as western ‘allochtone’ and 13% ‘non-western allochtone’. See page 9 of this text for a further discussion of what these terms mean.
13	Ruth Frankenberg, <i>Displacing Whiteness</i> (1997), (1999).
14	For this see McManus: Every word starts with ‘dis’, in <i>Reflecting Education</i> (2006) and Pos in The Netherlands (2014) exploring barriers to art school entry.

HOW TO ARTICULATE WHITENESS, IN AN ATTEMPT TO DISPLACE “THE UNMARKED MARKER”

cies/ dispositions. A major finding of the study undertaken by academics in Zurich⁹ was that circulating theories about inequality within the art school tend to delegate responsibility onto previous factors such as schooling, parents, or society in general.

The Dutch research is institutionally embedded within the framework of Creating 010¹⁰, a trans-disciplinary research centre which had cultural diversity as one of its research lines. It is also linked to the work in Zurich through a common board member Nana Adusei-Poku¹¹ who is principle investigator for setting up the **WdKA Makes A Difference** project within Creating 010 in The Netherlands. Working within this research centre and as a professional teacher within the art academy¹², has afforded me certain opportunities, perspectives and experiences that I will draw from in the course of this essay. One of these is continually finding myself in classrooms where the mix of students is disproportionate to the population of young people in Rotterdam. Teaching classes in which the majority of students are overwhelmingly white, middle class and coming from or are living in the suburbs and villages around Rotterdam. For whom, additionally, the subject matter under consideration in my cultural diversity classes: an exploration of identity, ontology, embodied & discursive power, is extremely challenging. My own academic proclivities are aligned with a critical sociological and feminist postcolonial perspective. My special interest lies in the ways multiple axis of differentiation intersect in historically specific contexts working simultaneously to render bodies into gendered, classed,

racialized, sexualised, religious, differently bodied subjectivities. Grounded in the theoretical ruminations of cultural theorist Stuart Hall where the concept of race is foregrounded, translating these theorems into the Dutch context results in a constant struggle to formulate the words with which to talk about ethnicity, culture and nationality using the Dutch language. How to articulate Whiteness¹³, in an attempt to displace “the unmarked marker” (FRANKENBERG 99, 1) that is, echoing Hall, part of its dominance and its attendant privileges are a challenge to what Hall (1991, 1992) has termed an ‘internalist’ European narrative. Intrinsic to this narrative is an envisioning of Whiteness as a largely homogenous entity, its development uninfluenced by outside forces or contact with other parts of the world, where race exists anywhere but in Europe, as those who are traditionally considered ethnic minorities are seen to be outside of the national community, notwithstanding the fact that the original migrant populations have now by and large become citizens (CHOW 2002). Moving away from discourses centring around simple binary oppositions becomes challenging in a context where binaries are disguised as reflecting stand alone ethnic differences.

Finding myself within this ‘internalist’ narrative, led to a reflection on the student body itself wondering if widening the participation of those who were let into the academy would lead to a concomitant widening of the discourse, embodied by those, about and not with whom, the discourse is spoken. Rather than focusing on the perception of, how young people living in Rotterdam with multiple heritages view the Art Academy¹⁴, as these young people are not where I am, I started from where I was. As echoing sociologists John Lofland and Lyn Lofland,

“fieldwork is time-consuming, arduous and often emotionally draining. Starting where you are can ease your access to certain research sites and informants... fieldstudies may emerge from personal experiences and opportunities that provide access to social settings” (2006, 9).

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According to educational equity academic Jenny Williams, student identities are constructed through difference and ‘polarizing discourses’ and are tied to the notion of an ideal student subject; the traditional, standard, 18-year-old student (1997, 26). Gaining access to those on the inside, the admissions staff who uphold and enforce the entrance requirements, I am hoping will give me a greater understanding of how the composition of the classes in which I teach has been formed. Furthermore, it allows me to probe whether the demographics of this student body is perceived as problematic by those representing the academy on such moments. I am curious as to whether there is a sense of urgency regarding the necessity of allowing other bodies into the art & design academy? Examining issues of, selection and admission to higher art education have led to a concentration on pre-entry factors and assessment criteria used to admit students into the academy. In an earlier investigation of widening participation policies in the UK, Steven Schwartz (2004) has interesting implications for this work. Namely, if the goal is to widen participation in higher education, which means to allow those groups into the academy who have traditionally been underrepresented, admissions are a key factor in who participates, getting-in. However, it is not clear to me at this stage if the same ambitions are present in this Dutch context.

Interestingly, Tony Bennet et al (2009, 1) researching the link between cultural capital and existing inequalities in the UK argue that

“visual art remains a strong field of classification of social position. Engagement with visual art, as part of a broad visual culture, is widespread, the availability of art substantial and access increasingly available. Yet core participation by better off groups remains resilient, even though fissures and cleavages occur across group boundaries.” (BENNETT ET AL., 2009, 131)

More recently, the results of the related research in Zurich, **Art School Differences** (2015), demonstrate how via loaded concepts such as: ‘having potential’, ‘talent’, ‘legitimate competencies’, exclusion in the system of art education is being generated and inequality reproduced. These processes enable social closure primarily through habitus (Bourdieu): people are excluded who do

RACE MAKES WAY IN THE NETHERLANDS ACADEMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR DIFFERENTIATIONS BASED ON ETHNICITY AND INCREASINGLY, CULTURE

not hold or embody the cultural capital required. The paramount importance of cultural capital for being admitted and also to progress in schools is enforced cannot be underestimated according to this body of work.

I am left wondering, how does the field within which the admissions staff operate at the WdKA work? Who is deemed to be a successful candidate and on the basis of what criteria are these decisions made?

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The term that the Dutch frequently use to distinguish between the native population and the rest is allochthonous, which does not have an English equivalent but generally means originating from elsewhere. The equivalent of “allochtonen” is “autochtonen”, meaning “those who are from here,” which, as is commonly known, refers to the white Dutch population¹⁵. The Netherlands, as of 2016, has a population of 17 million, 3.8 million of whom have a migration background, meaning that either they are first generation or second generation (born in The Netherlands) with either one or both parents being born abroad. This migrant population is further subdivided into western and non-western groups, whether a country is seen as Western is dependent on how similar its social economic or cultural arrangement is deemed to be to that of The Netherlands. The four predominant non-western groups are: Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and or Antillean, growth in these groups is as a result of second generation birth rates. Predominant western groups are from Indonesia, Germany, Poland and Belgium whilst the most refugees hail from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia¹⁶. The point of this discourse is to stress that the supposedly innocent terminology used to differentiate the population of The Netherlands is, as Gloria Wekker and Helma Lutz (2001) remind us, in fact racializing without the responsibility or burden of understanding who is racist. In fact, in The Netherlands the preferred marker of difference is ethnicity, referring to differences based on origin, appearance, history, culture, language and religion. However, to paraphrase Wekker’s (2016) observation, ethnicity and culture have been used in such hardened ways that biology and culture have become interchangeable, it functions as an essentialist imperative, fixing cultures as bounded entities and which are mutually distinctive. Wekker points our attention to the

THE MARKER OF RACE, ETHNICITY AND CULTURE

“Like fetishism primitivism is a system of multiple beliefs: an imaginary resolution of a real contradiction a repression of the fact that a breakthrough in our art, indeed a regeneration of our culture, is based in part on the breakup and decay of other societies, that the modernist discovery of the primitive is not only in part its oblivion but its death. And the final contradiction or aporia is this: no anthropological remorse, aesthetic elevation, or redemptive exhibition can correct or compensate this loss because they are all implicated in it.” ^{HAL FOSTER (1985, 81)}

What follows is an outline of responses to a question on more inclusive selection practices, and a presentation of how thinking about differences haunts the rest of what was said more indirectly throughout the interview sessions, to echo Wekker, “I am intrigued by the way that race pops up in unexpected places and moments” ^(2016, 1) The awareness of the need to think about and act upon diversity issues within the academy is itself broad-ranging, as are the conceptualisations of what diversity means. Leaving the word open to definition by respondents was as researchers a purposeful act, so as to make visible the tissues and layering of meaning making inherent in its usage.

BLAMING THE OTHER

Liberalist notions of meritocracy and individualism typified some responses, “as I see it, everybody who has talent, who is suitable, gets in irrespective of their background, ethnicity or whatever.” (Interviewee H), exemplifying a continued belief that if individuals work hard enough or are talented enough they will overcome the many obstacles, which are then related to themselves. Ethnicity either their own or the applicants not accounting for any larger historical context or habitus within which social relations and interactions, the rules of the game⁴⁰ ^(BOURDIEU 1977) have developed. Aside from the encapsulating a hegemonic notion of ‘talent’ which many theorists, as already discussed, view as a highly problematic, what is interesting here is what Wekker refers to as white innocence, which she argues is “part of a dominant Dutch way of being in the world” ^(2016, 12). This innocence informs the often voiced attitude above in many ways; firstly, a disavowal of the notion of racism or any form of discrimination as a possibility within their own selection practices, secondly, the notion of ‘suitability’ is relational, what are you fitting into and who fits into a predominantly white institution is absolutely linked to ethnicity, but as that ethnicity is white it remains invisible, furthermore if we follow Wekker’s thought processes further she casts doubt on how innocent this not-knowing is “this not-understanding, which can afflict white and non-white people alike is connected to practices of knowing and not-knowing, which are forcefully defended” ^(2016, 18). Part of this not-knowing is underappreciating that organizations “tend to recruit in their own image” ^(SINGH IN AHMED 2012, 40). As a result of this innocent position-taking it also becomes difficult to understand how another aspect of diversity within

“80% is MBO, 20% HAVO, 10 % VWO. No I, I would say that intelligence is an important factor in successfully completing a study here. Otherwise in the assessments, you observe how difficult it is to get MBO behaviour out of students, yes to adapt that and to bring them to a higher level to that of HBO, this is really difficult.” (Interviewee F)

The concern expressed is not in terms of how these students feel in the institute or how the institute could make them feel more welcome, but rather in terms of catching up, it becomes the same as the other desired WdKA students, who are able to follow through and understand business as usual teaching and knowledge based practices. In other words, the interactions in the name of organisationally sanctioned selection activities operate through a coded practice where power is reproduced in ways that obscure their workings.

LINGUISTIC CAPITAL

Additionally, the widespread use of unofficial selection criteria is expressed in a certain linguistic style which Bourdieu would identify as a form of embodied linguistic capital. The unequal distribution of attitudes that are traditionally associated with those from a more privileged habitus come into play when foregrounding for example; ‘risk taking’, ‘critical thinking’, ‘a curious mind’. The distinctions played out by candidates via the unequal distribution of linguistic capital are not only inscribed upon them by purely and when one looks at selectors accounts, abstractly but also by explicitly bodily, physical ones, as can be understood in the next example

“and then you notice in the way that he expresses himself that he didn’t look it up as part of his preparation. But there is a certain observable enthusiasm in his body language. Verifiable, to be seen in how he talks about it.” (Interviewee D)

The middle classes, Bourdieu argues are busy trying to achieve the practical mastery over “ennobled” uses of language (gentleness, proper uses of titles, usage of flowery adjectives, etc.) This desire to approximate a particular linguistic and behavioural style works as a marking of class barriers, symbolizing a mastery of ‘appropriate’ dispositions ^(BOURDIEU, 1991, 86-8, 124-5). Furthermore, as many scholars have argued, aesthetic value is itself socially constituted, and as such is an expression of a symbolic value. How characteristics such as ‘original’, ‘distinctive character’ or ‘quirky’ are to be measured and judged and made ‘transparent’ and ‘fair’ were not discussed by any of those interviewed bar one. Noticeably access to entry embodies encoded linguistic practices which are often framed within discourses of professionalism, specifically in a desire to maintain artistic and design standards whilst simultaneously not losing sight of treating everyone equally. There is a tendency to curtail the social and structural levels of exclusion by personalising them

“Or you can’t do it because you don’t have the background, the talent to do the assignment. I approach this formally, there is nothing subjective about talent. Absolutely not.” (Interviewee C)

arbiters of cultural value, and a concomitant absence of a challenge to the position of the observer/selector as genderless, raceless, classless, sexless etc. This universalist position was rarely disrupted or contested in the interview sessions. Bloom in **With other eyes, Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture**, argues that despite much writing to the contrary³⁸

“the authority of this art historical gaze that claims to “transcend” time and place persists in the new work as well as the old, particularly in terms of the way that the implicitly ethnocentric agenda of art history gets reproduced.” ^(1999, 4)

Indeed, if we contrast this with the descriptions of the skill set that the predominantly MBO students have upon entrance, provided by the same admissions staff, the contours of the necessary field requirements become very clear. “In each and every field, certain investments are at stake even if they are not recognized as such” ^(1993, 8). MBO students follow a vocational education route the intake staff characterised in the following ways:

“What you are looking for is the authenticity in their own creative work. And you don’t always find it in their work. Definitely not when an applicant shows a standard portfolio from secondary school or from a MBO course.” (Interviewee C)

“We are looking for an ability to communicate in a visual way, it can be done in many ways. Because we have a lot of MBO applicants, there we look for whether they can do that with the assignment we set them. If they go further than the assignment requires, to find images, to find a certain visual quality” (Interviewee B)

Considering the fact that many of the admissions staff feel an MBO education, producing students, “who only do what the tutor has asked them to do”, “that’s what they get marked on so if they do anything extra that is not appreciated nor rewarded.” (Interviewee A), the position of neutral judgement becomes difficult to maintain. If there is indeed a wider understanding and discourse surrounding students from an MBO background, then the very admissions frameworks which are set up to be impartial and transparent are reproducing the very social inequalities they were set up to work against. Bearing in mind that over the past decade, relatively more BME students have pursued this form of education than white Dutch students³⁹ we not only have a classed but also ethnicized discourse.

This could exemplify what HE diversity specialist Steyn (2010) in **Being Different Together**, identifies as a growing trend whereby *“difficult issues get folded into other topics rather than addressed directly, thus maintaining strategic silences and allowing the existing dynamics to roll over”* ^(2010, 34). MBO students were regularly problematized in these interviews, and framed within a deficit model, with deficit perspectives that both framed (racial) and classed bodies as minorities based on what they lacked. In many of the interviews students from this educational stream are compared negatively to HAVO students.

THE INTERACTIONS IN THE NAME OF ORGANISATIONALLY SANCTIONED SELECTION ACTIVITIES OPERATE THROUGH A CODED PRACTICE WHERE POWER IS REPRODUCED IN WAYS THAT OBSCURE THEIR WORKINGS

Museum visits as a marker of artistic sensibilities and interest have also been debunked by Bourdieu who posits the view that, *“members of the cultivated class feel entitled and obliged to visit this hallowed ground of culture from which others feel excluded for lack of culture”* ^(BOURDIEU 1991, 102).

THE INVISIBLE SELECTOR

To the cloak of neutrality surrounding the above selection practices within art institutions, I would add another, one that owes its existence to early film theorist Laura Mulvey³⁷. Mulvey’s influential work on the role of the male gaze, a critical reflection of a non-critical masculinist way of looking, it is thus a critique of the neutral I, the naturalized process of looking where a discerning eye, without history or subjectivity, is able to determine, establish the rightful value and true artistic merit of objects. Essential to her assessment and the reason for introducing it here is the tacit understanding among selection staff of themselves as

Thinking about these comments and the long list of desirables the interviewees provided left me wondering how accessible such a skill set could be for the average 18 to 20 year old. It seems to me that within this habitus, there seems to be a desire for a specific embodiment of cultural capital. Furthermore, here we see the notion of the artist as a romantic individual genius making itself present ^(BLOOM 1991). The desired applicant seems to be associated with the ‘unusual’, and processes of creativity that involve risk-taking and invention, characteristics historically associated with white, euro-centric forms of masculinity ^(SKEGGS 2004). These selection criteria seem ultimately to be embedded in entitlement discourses and in middle-class judgments about what counts as valuable and tasteful. In **The Love of Art** ⁽¹⁹⁹¹⁾, Bourdieu argues that the love conveyed by middle class parents gives their children a disposition to appreciate and understand art. Moreover, middle class families were more likely to own books on art, and talk about art, which leads their children to develop an interest in the subject, a critical eye and to become ‘people of taste.’

In these quotes I see a desire for the uniquely talented artist encapsulated, a romantic notion of the artist as an individual whose skill set emerges almost as a fixed set of attributes removed from any notion of habitus and cultural capital. The admissions staff list of expectations which lie at the heart of and within the fissures of the habitus, is both a marker and a position taking within the field, ultimately it is a statement of who does and does not belong in the academy. It is rule making and value setting, while revealing the strategy for playing the game to be floating, value laden, hidden in abstract categories, for those not able to make sense of this linguistic register. Again Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital is reflected in the vast array of desired criteria exhibited here in the dialectic of cultural knowledge, competences and dispositions expressed, that are largely internalized codes and or cognitive acquisitions. For the range and breadth of skill set mentioned by admissions staff to be present they must have been as Bourdieu puts it inculcated over a long period of time via family education and social institutions. Additionally, as Bourdieu argues these particular kinds of skill sets are unevenly distributed among social groups. McManus research into art school selection practices in the UK ^(MCMANUS ET AL., 2005) argues that the flip side of such interview questions reveals the desire for canonical right answers. Which is aptly demonstrated in the following excerpt:

“Imagine that an applicant comes from a social background with no art or design affinity, yes well then it becomes difficult. We ask questions about visiting museums, reading the paper or books... but yeah if they have never been to a museum well then they are already behind. But yes you can compensate this with your own ideas, own world but...” (Interviewee A)

According to McManus,

“these questions were seen as standardised neutral and objective, across the art and design academy, but are actually implicated in racialized and classed practices. The acceptable answers reflect white middle class habitus, cultural capital and ‘taste’.” ^(2005, 80).

10

TEANA BOSTON-MAMMAH THE ENTRANCE GAP

37 Visual pleasure and narrative cinema in: *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1975).

38 See the work of hooks (1992), Pellegrini (1997), Wallace (1998) Haraway (1991).

39 CBS, *Annual Report on Integration 2016 A summary* (2016).

11

WOKA MAKES A DIFFERENCE READER 2017

40 Bourdieu uses the notion of game within field to suggest the rules governing this area, the idea of competing contestants to increase or maintain their capital reserves be they symbolic, cultural, social or economic (Bourdieu, 1977).

the academy can affect candidates. Race and cultural theorist Ahmed in **On Being Included**, has emphasised the difficulties of inhabiting a BME body in a predominantly all white environment. “The body that causes their discomfort (by not fulfilling an expectation of whiteness) is the one who must work hard to make others comfortable” (2012, 41). I cite this perspective to disrupt the ‘irrespective of’ way of thinking that is commonplace in the interviews, that the background of the students does not matter. “It can be the simple act of walking into a room that causes discomfort. Whiteness can be an expectation of who will turn up.” Ahmed (2016, 40) For el Tayeb (2011) this ideology of colour blindness is a form of invisible European racialization. In the Dutch context this is apparent in the commonplace use of the terms *allochthonous* and *autochthonous*, serving as markers of ethnic difference happily coexisting alongside a colour blindness that suppresses the import thereof. That seeks to defend a ‘we are all equal’ stance, when the very ability to negate reveals the transcendental power to speak for everyone and a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time. (HALL 1996)

Other responses reveal an understanding of diversity as a single issue, where the standard student is implicitly white and diversity is located in either a classic academic intelligence or breaking through a naïveté arising out of age, gender and experience, or a combination of all three.

“I think diversity is extremely important. You want a class. Imagine that your class is full of MBO girls who still live with mum and dad at home. Just imagine, yes not very healthy. That’s not exactly what I call a brilliant learning environment. So you try, sometimes, so last year I took on someone who was way too old, I think perhaps almost 30...that you wonder what’s it going to be like for him in the middle of all those girls. He’d travelled the world over, taken a lot of photo’s, spent a long time in Berlin he had beautiful work. He had ideas, he was an independent thinker able to add a lot of valuable knowledge to the group. We try to look out for this. Diversity is indeed an important element for a healthy teaching environment.” (Interviewee A).

“We need more students from a VWO background to improve the diversity in the class.” (Interviewee A)

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TEANA BOSTON- MAMMAH THE ENTRANCE GAP	
41	Curacao was a former colony now constituent country of the kingdom of the Netherlands, and as such the public education system is based on that of the Dutch.

THE FOCUS ON BARRIERS TO EXCELLENCE ARE SEEN AS EXTERNAL TO THE INSTITUTION

As Burke and McManus have emphasized, potential, competence, or talent are ideologically loaded concepts that are “embedded in histories of classed and racialized inequalities, mis/recognition and complex power relations” (2009, 26) Added to these elements, we can read a negative perception of ‘girls living at home’, who are not felt to be the true inhabitants of the academy. Their cultural capital is undervalued and does not fit easily into the romantic, idea of the creative as quintessentially male, urban and white. Taking up a detached embodiment of the universal man (BLOOM 2012) which is seen as a more appropriate position than that of one who is living at home. Furthermore, choices made from what could very well be an economic necessity, are deemed ‘unhealthy’. Additionally, we see a rather stereotypical notion of man as an independent thinker, set to go off and discover the world i.e. not in a domestic setting, placed by default in opposition to playing it safe, rule bound conforming girls. Another aspect of the ideas expressed above is the focus on barriers

to excellence which are seen as external to the institution. It is not about the institution itself, but it is about, for example, residence conditions, gender and class when these are not part of the disposition and subjectivities of the standard student. Present is also a longing for another type of student one that encompasses the classic academic position, where brighter students will offer more potential. This was often accompanied by the concern that these desirable academic students would not stay long because they would miss learning in a challenging environment. How are we to read this, in some ways as a sort of longing a nostalgia for a time gone by when a particular form of expression or way of teaching was possible, and also as a confirmation of the long list of admissions staff expectations reflecting wider educational discourses on intelligence and ability. Ultimately, ability is uncritically embraced as a signifier of ‘inner ability’ or ‘potential’ (BURKE & MCMANUS 2009).

DIVERSITY IS OUT THERE

Many selectors associated with the idea of increasing diversity within the art school include policies aimed at increasing international collaborations between HE institutions. Exchange students from the University of Curacao’s⁴¹ art department were often positively cited as a concrete action being undertaken to stimulate greater diversity in the WdKA.

“We have an exchange programme with Curacao, with the academy there, where we actively encourage students from there to come here and that happens. Those students are here studying, so its getting better, but it does need more attention.” (Interviewee E)

However, concern was expressed by another selector:

“we have a few students from the sort of white lower-class, who have as a result inculcated racist ideas, and have not learnt how to speak differently... and sit among the Antillean students not realising that what they are saying could be hurtful, because as far as they are concerned we are all equal”. (Interviewee C)

These attitudes are interesting for many reasons, on the one hand, there is a clear attribution of cultural capital to international students. They are uncritically assumed to have high symbolic and cultural capital, an asset to the academy desirable of attracting global artistic talent. On the other hand, I am left wondering why local students who embody one or more cultural and or ethnic heritages

are not seen as potentially welcome creatives. The problem of diversity can only be resolved by outsourcing to other countries. But, this presence also is not unproblematic, as these students become the unwitting victims of possibly racist and or discriminatory comments that are ‘innocent’, there is a strong unwillingness to see racism, and a willingness to wrap it into terms that make the reading of it in some senses positive, racism read as the practice of equality. A double abdication of responsibility occurs here, on the one hand by the students whose backgrounds are really to blame and not they themselves and on the other by a teacher who has effectively removed themselves from the equation and thus obfuscates their own role and power to intervene in this setting. Wekker points to another aspect of white innocence laid bare here, which is the commonly held notion that “by definition, racism is located in working-class circles, not among “our kind of middleclass people” (2016, 18)

Other admissions tutors remarked on the whiteness of the teaching teams within the art school, others are concerned with making exchange students feel at home, while yet others see it as incidental, based more on actual events such as having a discussion about the Charlie Hebdo incident in the class. What is noticeable at this stage is a lack of readiness to interpret these ideas within the framework of a habitus where systemic racial and cultural domination is embedded. Most of the respondents stated a de facto awareness of how white the academy is either with reference to the student population and or the teaching staff, however only one in particular highlighted its exclusionary significance and the repercussions this could have in the curriculum, “I do think that the art academy in general, is a very white, white thinking, western orientated context”, (Interviewee F). Various political initiatives by the local municipality to make the academy multicultural, and to attract more students from South Rotterdam to cross the north-south divide that exists, was mentioned by one interviewee, who concluded, “I hardly see anyone from South⁴² participating here though” (C). What I find most revealing in this citation is the positioning of the speaker as outside the sphere of change, a discomobulation about who is the agent of this transformation lies at the centre of my interest, for it seems to be neither the person speaking, or the institute itself. Responsibility seems to lie outside with a third party. Operating at its core is an ideological ambivalence, underlying it is a set of beliefs in support of widening participation whilst waiting for another to implement the necessary practices. The pilot sister study **Art School Differences** (2011) in Zurich, has as one of its conclusions that

“this social uniformity stands in great contradiction with the flamboyant self-descriptions of art schools in global competition, nor with the idealistic concepts of art “as a civilising force that has the power to both challenge and transcends historically entrenched systems of social inequality”

as Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez⁴³ has put it.

IN THESE EXAMPLES OF EXCLUSIONS A KIND OF CULTURAL ESSENTIALISING IS TAKING PLACE THAT DEPICTS THESE CANDIDATES AS ETHNIC BEINGS THUS NOT ARTISTIC

HAUNTING THE INTERVIEWS

Another feature of the interviews reveals how in particular moments ethnic diversity finds expression, pops up, and in general, is framed in one the following ways: often within a discourse of; trying to help the few that do apply by “giving them a chance” (Interviewee B), by “taking greater care to assess their work” (Interviewee A), “we have the tendency to give them preferential treatment”, “if we are doubting, we think let’s try it”, (Interviewee H).

Subsumed beneath these comments is a benevolent attitude, one that is ‘looking out for’ diversity, to help them into the academy, so that it transforms itself by becoming a place of diversity. Conversely, the very act of trying harder to find the talent within these BME bodies reveals, to me, diversity as a form of hospitality, which serves to reinforce the host as whiteness (AHMED 2018). To be welcomed in this way is according to Ahmed to be reminded that you are not at home. In fact, she maintains that the welcome is not unconditional, but is dependent on “integrating into a common organisational culture, or by “being” diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity” (2016, 43) Moreover, buried within these words is the notion

13	
WOKA MAKES A DIFFERENCE READER 2017	
42	South Rotterdam is a euphemism for poor and of migrant origin with little to no educational opportunities, much poverty, unemployment and heavily reliant on social services and benefits. The South is the poorest part of Rotterdam. See www.rotterdam.nl/nprz, Entzinger & Engberson, 2014.
43	Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén/Vander-Dussen, Elena/Cairns, Kate (2012): “The Mall” and “the Plant”: Choice and the Classed Construction of Possible Futures in Two Specialized Arts Programs. In: <i>Education and Urban Society</i> 20, page 2.
44	http://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/view/creators/Goodwin=3APaul=3A=3A.html

that these students are not in and of themselves good enough, extra care needs to be taken in reading their work. Consequently, the prospect of misrecognition looms large due to the, ‘we are doing them a favour’ discourse. As curator and urban theorist Paul Goodwin in the UK has repeatedly contended⁴⁴ the impact of BME arts and creativity visible in the global commodification of Black urbanism, is not supported by a concomitant inclusion of these same groups within art schools, because as a general practice they remain on the outside looking in. This role as diversity benefactor, acts to keeps the focus on an individualistic, ahistorical, level and leaves me wondering whether the intention to change the(ir) perception of the institution to which the admissions staff belong rather than the institutional practices themselves.

Other remarks concerned the perceived artistic qualities of BME students who were not successful candidates, explained away as, “his work had something sunny and happy about it... but there was something missing in his application form” (Interviewee A) and “they thought she wanted to bring the Surinamese culture into The Netherlands art academy, they expressed doubts about her cultural background being enough for the arts & crafts programme she wanted to follow” (Interviewee C)

Here I am reminded of McManus and Burke’s findings, who noted in those willing to give widening participation policies a chance that as a consequence of habitus confronting,

“an unfamiliar field, although the experience can be transformative, it more often produces feelings of discomfort, ambivalence and uncertainty”, (BEAY ET AL., IN MCMANUS AND BURKE, 2009, 20).

Besides which these explanations of unsuccessful applicants are reminiscent of Bourdieu’s (1991) assertion that art is implicated in the reproduction of disparities, whereby the relationship between culture and power results in affinity to tastes as artistic qualities works to create and uphold social differences. The cultural capital of certain ethnic groups, is thereby devalued and delegitimised (BOURDIEU, 1984). In these specific examples of exclusions, a kind of cultural essentialising is taking place, that depicts these candidates as ethnic beings thus de facto not artistic. Using descriptions such ‘sunny’, ‘happy’ and ‘bringing

colour’ functions to infantilise these prospective candidates. Conjuring up images of a hapless, naïveté rather than an independent globally orientated critical creative, so desired by selection staff. Significantly, as Hall (2013) has pointed out one of the results of the West encountering black people gave rise to a regime of representations where black people were portrayed as simple, childlike, happy even in slavery. These innocent words echo a cultural archive (WEKKER 2016) in which white people were associated with a culture that was developed to overcome and subdue nature while black people’s culture was inextricably bound up with their nature, fixing them as inferior (HALL 2013). The cultural archive is to be found in the mind and hearts of metropolitan citizens,

“its content is also silently cemented in policies, in organizational rules, in popular and sexual cultures, and in common-sense everyday knowledge, and all of this is based on four hundred years of imperial rule.” (WEKKER 2016, 19)

The last two observations reveal a further stereotyping of current BME students:

“We have a student with a Muslim background, brilliant and ambitious. He only wants to work with textiles within interior design. Yes, that and so I asked him why? But working with textiles are for men there is very natural, that is good. So now I get it.” (Interviewee C).

The successful student is not making the standard choice and is not understood from a perspective of creativity but one of cultural masculinist essentialism. Working on the gender script that textiles within an interior design is something women do, it is therefore a spectacle⁴⁵ if an ambitious male student of Muslim faith chooses this path. However, the notion that a highly ambitious male student is working within the feminine field of textiles within interior design leads to confusion until he reveals he is following a culturally gendered script from another country, a making sense, fixing his behaviour in ethnic terms and therefore readable.

“We have some Antillean students, but they are still in the minority, still yes. I think its also because they think, yes what can you become by studying visual arts? And its better to be a pharmacist or something, yes.” (Interviewee H)

Disclosures such as these situate the absence of BME students as a failure of the other to understand the value of art and design, accordingly Sarah Ahmed claims, “the problem of whiteness is thus re-described here not as an institutional problem but as a problem with those who are not included by it.” (2016, 35) This comment is inscribed as an ethnic marker of difference, the implication being that there is little or no appreciation of art and design and the role it can play in what are considered ‘other cultures’. Culture, here acts as a real thing not an abstract and purely analytical notion, approaching culture as anthropologists of old did, which is as normative and predictive. Culture here causes behaviour and is not understood as an abstraction from it. Taken-for-granted realities in this way are institutionally self perpetuating,

“the widespread belief that some social distinctions are ethnic by nature can take

on its own social momentum as ethnicity, too, is subjected to reification... It is this process of reification ...that gives it the appearance of being an autonomous factor in the ordering of the social world” (BAUMANN 1996, 19).

CONCLUSION

Having come to the end of my examination of how selection processes operate, there are several major findings which need to be critically assessed if we are to take part in a serious attempt to rethink whom we want to select and what we as an institution want to become. If we are to become more than a field for teachers to recognise and reward the advantage of those with specific forms of cultural capital and thus exclude those without, reward culture-related competencies rather than art, design or creative potential.

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Such selection practices subject working class and or BME applicants to a form of symbolic violence that rewards only a dominant cultural capital. This action, is uncritically assumed to be meritocratic and legitimate. Utilising and promoting such arbitrary criteria of assessment, we could argue that admissions staff are engaged in shoring up a habitus of which they themselves are a part. Without making strenuous attempts to alter the backgrounds of staff, notions of who is and who is not creative, the gap between who takes a seat within the academy and those on the outside will only continue to increase. Population changes in the rest of Rotterdam will take care of that. ●

Secularism Matters European Muslims and European Politics

Jan van Heemst

(BLOGPOST 2016)

Over the last decade, my Dutch neighbourhood has seen its Badr mosque flourishing. On Fridays, Dutch Muslims, some in djellabas, gather outside before passing through the main entrance for prayers, while Dutch Muslimas, all veiled, are taking the side doors. On Sundays, Dutch children queue up for Quran classes. These encounters are not exceptional; everywhere in the European Union, we are experiencing public manifestations of Islamic monotheism. Like Jewish and Christian monotheisms,

JAN VAN HEEMST

SECULARISM MATTERS

EUROPEAN MUSLIMS AND EUROPEAN POLITICS

Islamic monotheism can historically be seen as a zeal system that condensed into scriptural-oriented socio-religious practices (SLOTERDIJK 2013). Social-religious practices are the public manifestations of the zeal system. As such, they externalize inner consciousness and piety in outer configurations of religion by inducing variable institutional and discursive fields that make different kinds of knowledge, action, and desire possible (ASSAD 2003, 217). Why bother about their presence?

In blurring the delicate line between the logic of private and the logic of public, socio-religious practices of European Muslims testify to Rosi Braidotti’s analysis of the post-secular turn in view of a revival of the debate on the relationship between religion and politics (BRAIDOTTI 2008). In this article, I take the position that critically understanding the post-secular turn in public manifestations of Islamic monotheism requires redefining secularism. Only a robust notion of non-cultural

secularism (BIGHAMI 2014) will provide insight in the intricate relationship between socio-religious practices of European Muslims and politics. I am going to value non-cultural secularism, amongst other things, not only because it permits Europeans to angrily question anti-integrationinvolvementsofultra-orthodox European Muslims in European societies, but also because it entitles ultra-orthodox European Muslims to be opposed to what they quite understandably term the libertarian fabric of these societies, provided that their ultra-orthodox socio-religious practices are not contrary to the fundamental rights and other constitutions of liberal democracy. Whether these fundamentals pertain to public manifestations of Islamic monotheism, will be discussed in due course.

To grasp the intricacies of the relationship between socio-religious practices of European Muslims and politics in Europe, I first consider socio-religious practices of European Muslims in terms of religious group synthesis that appear to be incompatible with a majoritarian cultural legitimization of European nation-states. In this context, I will indicate that, for a sociological majority of nation-state populists, Europeanness boils down to Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots. Before exploring in more depth what this means for socio-religious practices of European Muslims, I will clarify, by extension, the contrast between cultural and democratic legitimizations of the nation-state, so as to highlight the importance of the notion of non-cultural secularism in a culturally plural society that accords with the fundamental rights and other constitutional commitments of liberal democracy. Whereas references to Judeo-Christian roots deny European Muslims the legal space to deploy their socio-religious practices, this is basis of non-cultural secularism eventually sees that both supporters and despisers of socio-religious practices are to be tolerated within the bounds of liberal democracy.

Let me start, then, with a closer inspection of socio-religious practices of European Muslims. From a critical standpoint, socio-religious practices are instances of inter-subjectivization of actual concerns. Even in individualistic orientations in what is mostly superficially understood as ‘belief’, they act as catalysts to set off differentiated trains of socialities that thrive on bonding. This phenomenon can be typified as religious group synthesis. It is yet important to notice that within socio-religious practices, as in other social ensembles, individuals not only have different experiences of what group synthesis means for them personally, but also shared interests that overlap in intersecting clusters (GREENSHAW 1984). In socio-religious practices, there are middle-class and working-class women, black and white, Dutch-Moroccan and Dutch-Surinam, mothers and singletons, sisters and daughters, heterosexual and lesbian, to take some distinctions between women with overlapping implications for being members of a group. So while it is important to be vigilant against the essentialization of collective categories (BATTANSI 2007, 114-8), the persistently public expressiveness of socio-religious practices adds to the effectiveness of religious group synthesis in terms of bonding. This last stipulation is a crucial element in my argument. For in Europe, socio-religious practices of European Muslims are particularly at stake when religious group synthesis is being

14	
TEANA BOSTON-MAMMAH THE ENTRANCE GAP	

⁴⁵ See el Tayeb (2011: xxiv) for use of spectacular here, referring to the active process of forgetting of repressing the presence of non-white Europeans, as having no place in the collective memory except as a threat or a continuous temporality.

scrutinized as practices of bonding that are said to be strange to Europeaness.

Today, European Muslims are sharing socio-religious practices that many Europeans are willing to consider anything but European. Public manifestations of Islamic group synthesis noticeably feature in the assemblage of peculiarities, demarcations, tendencies, and tensions, that presently condition cultural diversity in Europe ([CASANOVA 2009](#)). Cultural diversity already stands for different kinds of socio-religious practices that fuel heated debates about the ostensibly evident character of Europeaness. It is the persistently public expressiveness of socio-religious practices that makes them culturally disputed ([FERRARI AND PASTORELLI 2012](#)). There are numerous European university teachers who strongly doubt the Europeaness of European students observing Islamic dietary habits in European university cafeterias. There are numerous European art school students who strongly doubt the Europeaness of European art school teachers observing Islamic dress codes in European art school studios.

Muslim or not, most European students and teachers live in nation-states that foster a society in which all citizens will have to feel at home ([DUYVENDAK 2011](#)). Home ground localism accounts for a cultural legitimization of the nation-state; a process that has been intensified in the tumult of the so-called refugee-crisis ([WIKE ET AL., 2016](#)). The nation-state is culturalized by a dominant ethnie as coined by Smith. ([SMITH 2009, 27](#)). A dominant ethnie is the sociological majority of nation-state populists that is masquerading its majoritarian interests at home – historical claims, civic language, white male privileges – as universalism. In Europe’s nation-states, majoritarian interests are recognized, accommodated, and supported by specific government decisions on housing, education, law, taxation, internal boundaries, public holidays and nation-state symbolism. Across Europe, however, majoritarian interests are passed off as universalism in a transnational identity construction comprising cultured consensus about the authentication of Europe’s Europeaness; what Europe’s dominant ethnics are most willing to advocate today, after all, are Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots. Although the European Union Parliament, in 2003, did not include Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots in the draft text of the European Constitution, debates reflected almost unanimous sympathy to the cause, either as an impetus to caring for strangers, or as bulwark against Islam. Both stances are exclusionary, as I will point out further below, when I shall set up an interpretative confrontation with Europe’s allegedly Judeo-Christian roots. Here it must already be stressed that speaking of ‘Judeo-Christian roots’ indirectly refers to highly questionable vistas of Europe’s past. There are urgent reasons not to boast all too gleefully on ‘Judeo-Christian roots’ in the grim light of age-old Christian anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in European history ([POLIAKOV, 1955-77](#)).

Having said that, I first have to return now in more detail to the dominant ethnie that demands that ‘we all’ internalize its majoritarian interests. The sociological majority thus uses its prerogative of definition in order to impose what they proclaim to be the cultural legitimization of the nation-state. Cultural legitimization is almost

generally accorded a positive valence in all the nation-states in the EU. It is vocally exalted across the political spectrum in a wide repertoire of populist phraseology, especially when election times are coming up. The cultural legitimization of the European nation-state is obliging: to integrate into the nation-state coincides with being bound to integrate into mainstream culture by paying tribute to the cultured consensus of the dominant ethnie ([SCHINKEL AND SCHROVER 2014](#)). A cultured consensus about integrating into the nation-state, to name just one (not completely trivial) example, is prone to reject socio-religious practices that refrained from direct association with nation-state symbolism in official celebrations for the Vienna Congress Bicentennial in 2015. As a consequence, the dominant ethnie increasingly sees European Muslims’ religious group synthesis as an unsurmountable obstacle to being unconditionally acknowledged as co-citizens who share the nationality of ‘their’ nation-state.

HAVING ONLY RELATIVELY RECENTLY COUNTED ON DIVIDING HUMANITY INTO EMPIRES AND COLONIES, EUROPE’S NATION-STATES ARE NOW CONSIDERABLY BEING WEAKENED BY THE FORCES OF GLOBALISATION

The cultural legitimization of the European nation-state, rooted in the political nationalisms of the nineteenth century in the aftermath of the 1814-5 Vienna Congress, has been aptly described by Will Kymlica ([2001](#)) as the establishment of national societies that condition common belonging. Having only relatively recently counted on dividing humanity into empires and colonies, though, Europe’s nation-states are now considerably being weakened by the forces of globalisation. If Arjun Appadurai’s prognostications prove to be correct, the nation-state has entered an acute crisis; one only needs to look closely at the variety of what have emerged as diasporic spheres to realize that in Europe, too, nation-states face the transpiring of a postnational world ([APPADURAI 1996, 22](#)). In a later paragraph, I will suggest that a postnational world might be a world in which everyone can be with everybody on non-exclusionary terms. Here I want to stipulate that the diminution of the European nation-state amply amounts to what Dipesh Chakrabarti has analysed as the postcolonial provincialization of Europe’s Europeaness ([CHAKRABARTI 2007](#)). I hold that the dominant ethnie’s cultural legitimization of the European nation-state is a brazen attempt to repudiate these signs. Because the nation-state’s culture is being endangered, a normative project is formulated in defining and protecting the majoritarian interests of the sociological majority that must prevail by all ways.

Majoritarian interests are salvaged in defining a cultural sphere of common belonging versus a sphere of others by means of exclusion, hostility, hate movements, and, above all, the struggle against the fiercest and most intrepid enemies that have lodged themselves in the deepest pores of the nation-state, forming a kind of cyst that would destroy the nation-state’s most fertile promises from within. The problem, in this sense, is how to separate the nation-state from that which gnaws at it without harming its very body. Thus, Europe’s nation-states are now being drawn into a fervent desire for cultural surveillance. Hence the growing authoritarianism in stressing the social order as a cultural infrastructure of ethnic-supremacy. In the face of ethnic-supremacy, the public distinctiveness of Islamic group synthesis inevitably leads up to cultural friction, for it openly challenges triumphalist vistas of integration and contention within the



Visitors entering Dutch Parliament debates on Burqa ban, 11th November 2016. Photo Bart Maat

nation-state. Socio-religious practices of European Muslims are the strains of disquieting differences that come from ethnic minority groups in the midst of mainly white male European dominant ethnies. Articulations of Islamic group synthesis not only disclaim the culturalization of the nation-state that accounts for majoritarian interests in the name of Europe’s Europeaness. In doing so, they also uncover the nation-state that closes them out.

The nation-state that closes socio-religious practices of European Muslims out is a cultural artefact that the dominant ethnie fosters as an imagined community ([ANDERSON 1991](#)). Imagined communities persist because they hold out the prospect of coping with collective concerns that cannot otherwise be handled by individuals acting alone. Being the imagined community of the dominant ethnic, the nation-state suggests that it will bring relieve in all the confusion about ethnic minority groups manifesting themselves in the persistently public expressiveness of socio-religious practices that makes them disquieting. Community is the telling point here: a dominant ethnic only occurs in communality. More exactly, it is the very regimentation of communality. To the extent that a dominant ethnic entails a communality that is civic, culture becomes the litmus test for being civilized; and that is why, to this day, in the imagined communities of social majorities, culture is the obvious legitimization of the nation-state. On

this basis, socio-religious practices of European Muslims are liable to disqualification from nation-state culture by a dominant ethnic that considers public manifestations of Islamic monotheism to be at variance with the civic communality of the imagined community. Cultural diversity from this viewpoint is disruptive, an upset of status quo normality, which must somehow be governed so that the mainstream culture can function undisturbed by any threat of difference from the inside. This is a strong motive for the new religious intolerance Martha Nussbaum, in her ethics of politics ([NUSSBAUM 2012](#)), is detecting in Europe.

Here my argument is reaching the point where I must contrast cultural with democratic legitimizations of the nation-state, so as to highlight later below the importance of the notion of non-cultural secularism in a culturally plural society that accords with the fundamental rights and other constitutional commitments of liberal democracy. I have shown that, although European Muslims are fully entitled to live in European nation-states, European Muslims share the persistently public expressiveness of socio-religious practices find themselves plunged into an endless racket of signs and gestures, symbols and tokens, delivered with increasing obstinacy like a series of continual reprimands, because the dominant ethnic considers its cultural legitimation of the nation-state to be the requisite of a participatory kind of communality for the civic benefit of every

citizen. In other words, civic communality and political entity are being merged into a polity that operates as nation-state culture. Within the framework of this article, this polity can basically be seen as a constellation of people that the dominant ethnic is organizing as a fully-fledged society in the nation state, while politics refers to the actions or activities the dominant ethnic uses in order to ensure that its power is exercised as ethnic-supremacy in the polity. Rather than the political citizen, the politics of the nation-state-polity thus engages the cultural citizen in the vigorous pursuit of a mythical lost unity of a ‘great society’ that might be regained as a homogeneous safeguard against the irreducible heterogeneity of the globalising world’s diasporic spheres. This concern about mixture and motley-ness reveals a dream of a hegemonic project for the sociological majority of the polity. It thrives on segregation. As segregation is diametrically opposed to a culturally plural society that accords with the fundamental rights and other constitutional commitments of liberal democracy, I find it utterly appropriate to shed a bit more light on the politics that can make for a polity, so that the contrast between cultural and democratic legitimizations will turn out even considerably sharper.

First and foremost, it is important to remember that politics designates not solely a modus operandi for exercising cultural dominance. It is also a template for the democratic legitimization of representational self-government in the nation-state; European liberal democracies must count for its constitutionality. So far, however, no compelling argument has been made that politics inherently entails democratic constitutions, deliberation, participation, rights, universality, or even equality. Examples are abundant. They range from Plato to Žižek, or, come to that, from Aristotle to Agamben. I restrict myself to two archetypical items that are significant for my objectives. In Plato’s **Republic**, firstly, politics involves only an elite; and in spite of the fact that Plato fully recognized and harshly condemned aristocratic degeneration, his stance on politics in classical Athens culminated in extremely intellectual expressions of an increasing elitist position towards a people that he held to be ignorant and incompetent, a rabble subject to the blandishments of demagogues ([WOOD 1978](#)). For Plato, democracy is plainly a corruption of essentials, resulting from epistemological obfuscation. Ergo: a philosopher-king. For Aristotle, secondly, things are slightly more complicated. In the famous section 1281b of his **Politics** ([ARISTOTLE/SH 1894](#)), Aristotle estimates democracy by treasuring the *kuria* (sovereignty) of the *ekklèsia* (assembly). In the less famous yet equally vital section 1279a, however, sovereign power —*kurion*— hovers between ‘constitution’ and ‘government’. Thanks to Giorgio Agamben ([2012, 2-3](#)), I notice that already in this founding text of European liberal democracy, politics is wavering between constitutional fundamentals and governmental management. I cannot enter here into more detailed textual exegesis, but it does seem obvious to me that the latter meaning prevails in contemporary ethnic-supremacy, where governmental management is carried out by cultural dominance.

Historically, all democracies have incessantly featured occluded substrates against which they forcefully expounded to legitimize themselves in governmental

management by cultural dominance —whether barbarians, slaves, natives, women, the poor, people of colour, or ethnicities. It is well known that Athenian democracy itself benefitted a male minority of its inhabitants, while failing to include women as well as slaves. Moreover, as Wendy Brown has stipulated, democracy’s white, masculine, and colonial representatives have permitted and perpetuated democracy’s hierarchies, exclusions, and repressions across the entirety of democracy’s cultural regime ^(BROWN 2012, 52). Democratic fairness amongst fellow citizens still does not rule out the possibility of unfairness towards refugees and immigrants ^(RAMADAN 2011, 54). This does not attest that the notion of democracy needs to be invalidated; what needs to be invalidated is the seizure of the notion of democracy by democracy’s self-appointed representatives.

European recent history saw the emergence of democracy’s white, masculine, and colonial representatives in the guise of an a priori free subject establishing democracy as the only legitimate political form. Feminists in particular have analyzed how the discourse that links masculine democracy with muscular fraternity is not merely metaphorical ^(YOUNG 1989, 253). Under this banner democracy promoted and promised the liberty of the whole human being within the equality of all human beings ^(SIEDENTOP 2014). The a priori free subject is the authority of the democrat who makes democracy’s legitimacy culturally incontestable by all means. In a colossal process of inversion of the political by the cultural, the democrat invokes culture so as to proclaim democracy’s *raison d’être*. For him, political equality and cultural sameness are identical. Citizenship for everyone? Then everyone the same qua citizen. Since his conjectures clearly concern the maintenance of a polity in which a dominant ethnie hold sway as democracy’s officials, everyone else is basically from elsewhere. The known polity of these officials—in our case: European nation-states—is not the polity of everyone ^(BADIOU 2008). Now that we are witnessing the perseverance of democracy’s officials in a wide repertoire of populist phraseology across the political spectrum in the EU, we can easily see that the danger for democracy lies in the cultural legitimization of the nation-state that keeps the dominant ethnie in a fenced enclosure where its majoritarian interests can only be reinforced in a permanent devaluation of the fundamentals of liberal democracy.

Religious freedoms are highly illustrative of these fundamentals. They permit European Muslims everywhere in the EU to participate in socio-religious practices that are the public manifestations of Islamic monotheism. Therefore, a basic set of religious freedoms is to be upheld within a liberal framework that enshrines fundamental rights and constitutional commitments, as it is most stringently advocated by John Rawls ⁽²⁰⁰⁵⁾ and Charles Taylor ⁽²⁰⁰⁷⁾. Once this is recognized, attention can be paid to the justice of minority rights claims ^(KYMLIČKA 1995, 108). As a result, while individuals are free to conform to religious group synthesis for themselves, and to try to persuade others to act accordingly, it does not allow the group to restrict the basic civil liberties of its members in the name of particular socio-religious practices. Further, it is up to the individuals themselves to decide how they view practicing their religion. For the pursuit of practices

18

JAN VAN HEEMST
SECLARISM
MATTERS

TOLERANCE IS A DEMOCRATIC MEANS TO SETTLE CONFLICTS ON ACCOUNT OF NON-CULTURAL SECULARISM

that are valued for religious sakes, freedom of conscience is a precondition. For that reason, too, the nation-state must succeed in relegating cultural differences to a democratic polity that involves jurisdiction and political institutions. Such a polity, as a civil constellation or body, is inevitably pluralistic, offering space for different socio-religious practices. This diversity is yet balanced and constrained by the juridico-institutional cohesion that is characteristic of liberal democracy. ^(KYMLIČKA 2002, 34).

Under these conditions, different ways of life can be tolerated. The boundaries of toleration are delineated in the non-cultural stipulation of secularism I referred to as the core subject of this article. In a culturally plural society, non-cultural secularism requires a free exercise of religious group synthesis except when socio-religious practices are inconsistent with the fundamental rights and other constitutional commitments of liberal democracy. I therefore resolutely contest the idea that tolerance is an intellectual charity of the high-ups, as Tariq Ramadan has put it forward ^(RAMADAN 2011, 39). In my view, tolerance is a democratic means to settle conflicts on account of non-cultural secularism. In the case of conflicting interests, e.g. involving gender equality or free speech, there is an ordering in which the democratic ideals of the polity are placed first by virtue of law. It must be explicitly stressed that the ideals of the polity are democratic, not cultural. A defence of the democratic ideals of the polity, then, does not necessarily include an obligation to share or respect a culture consensus. Even if people do not share or respect, then religious difference does

not necessarily turn into mutual ignorance or hatred. Laws are meant not just to make coexistence between people with different socio-religious practices possible, they are also meant to make the vigorous pursuit of those practices allowable, as far as they are not inconsistent with the democratic ideals of the polity.

As I pointed out earlier in this article, cultured consensus about the authentication of Europe’s Europeanness offers quite another picture. In the authentication of Europe’s Europeanness, the democratic ideals of the polity are outweighed by Europe’s supposedly Judeo-Christian roots. I already indicated that speaking of ‘Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots’ indirectly refers to highly questionable vistas of Europe’s past. It yet makes sense to critically relate Europe’s supposedly Judeo-Christian roots to Europe’s supposedly Europeanness, because such an approach can offer us insights that might play havoc with the conventional classifications of cultural binaries. It is the interrelatedness of dominant ethnic and majoritarian culture that is presently leading up to the denunciation of Islam as a generic menace to Europeanness, while practicing a collective identity that would be detrimental to its Judeo-Christian roots. Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots are propagated in populist discourses that lay out a pattern of imperial culture that makes imaginable, even natural orientalisng images of Muslims as a herd requiring controlling, radically other, different from European civilization ^(SAID 1993). This construction of Islam may simply talk of diversity, but it is clearly discriminatory nonetheless. Martha Nussbaum therefore rightly insists on sound principles that we ought to uphold in the area of socio-religious group practices. ^(NUSSBAUM 2012, 244). Again, the non-cultural stipulation of secularism fulfils the requirements. To the extent it takes a stance vis-à-vis religion, non-cultural secularism comes down to the democratic realm of the polity, as I just indicated, rather than a cultural regime that insists on redirection of either personal belief or any range of religious group synthesis in dress codes or dietary habits or, for that matter, mosque-going. Thus, in itself, non-cultural secularism is a sound principle, in that it contrasts sharply with the formulation of a cultured consensus demanding that all participate for the same cultural reason in pursuance of Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots.

Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots are nowhere stronger acclaimed than via the work of the influential Jewish-French thinker Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas’ theo-philosophy is a suggestive search for traces of transcendency in terms of an ethical dignity. Traces can be detected on others’ faces that appeal to us unconditionally but powerless. ^(LEVINAS 1971, 77). They are appealing because, for all their powerlessness, they beseech us not to seize the others’ otherness, that is, according to Levinas, not to violate their ethical dignity. What is important here is not only to realize that others’ otherness exhibits sentimental helplessness and submissiveness, but also that, for their ethical dignity, others’ faces are indebted to something supplementary other manifesting itself in them. For what we are encountering in them is an epiphany of the indefinite – which is Levinas’ idiosyncratic mode of indicating a divine agent whose oneness the scriptures consider the epitome of otherness. Others, then, owe their otherness to one Other. They open up the locus of the fundamental Judeo-Christian experience of the human essence grounded in a traumatic encounter of one Other, and of this divine Other qualifying them as enigmatic stakeholders of humanity ^(ŽIŽEK 2001, 106-9). Only insofar we acknowledge that otherness presents itself in traces of transcendence, others’ faces do what one Other has made them fit for: to summon mankind to living up to universal ethical dignity ^(LEVINAS 1971, 175).

It is this unshakable self-evidence of theo-philosophy, with its insatiable drive to being accepted, that makes it impossible to acknowledge the radically disruptive effects of otherness once it has fossilized into Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots. What was radical other settles into radical convention; minority positions become enfranchised by a supplementary understanding of otherness in a *punctum divinum* outside the world. The alternative for this plainly patronizing approach is far more complex, I am afraid, but it is the only one, I think, compatible with the hybrid nature of contemporary societies, as it hinges on a more considered judgement of otherness according to the politico-philosophical axioms of an ontology of the present ^(NANCY 2000). From that perspective, a supplementary understanding of otherness is at odds with a postnational world that is singularly plural and plurally singular, a world in which everyone can be with everybody, everyone each time being singular, and everyone each time singularly sharing the same possibility of being that none of them can claim to be exclusively the world’s essence. In other words, sharing the world is an understanding that all the people share understanding all the people’s world.

TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IS PROCESSED IN MODALITIES OF EXCLUSION THAT ARE VOICED IN FEVERISH PHANTASMAGORIAS OF ‘THE ENEMY’

Otherness is therefore to be sought beyond a theo-philosophical articulation of ethical dignity. It implies a recognition of others that need not internalize a set of maxims, that mainstream pundits perceive as Europe’s indispensably cultural essentials that are the openly imperative character of that which must be read as the universal constitution of otherness. Universality breaks down the moment we realize that the world has no supplement; it is indefinitely the world in and for itself. Ethical dignity, by contrast, designates a being-together of existences in the name of one Other, which, in terms of cultured consensus, has become a Judeo-Christian point of reference for Europeanness tout court. Within these limits, a defence of one’s way of life necessarily includes ethical culturalism in which all sides are to share or respect the imagined communities of social majorities. Beyond these limits, a realm of questions crops up that point to a non-referential belonging, that is, an unconditional communality (Agamben 1990) of humans who co-belong without any representable condition of being obliged to paying tribute to a theo-philosophical articulation of an ethical dignity that is rooted in a Judeo-Christian master narrative.

19

WOKA MAKES
A DIFFERENCE
READER 2017

I now can explore in more depth what Europe’s Judeo-Christian roots mean for socio-religious practices of European Muslims, while simultaneously highlighting the importance of the notion of non-cultural secularism. As a socio-religious practice, Islam deals with most distant, ever elusive and pertinently evasive factors, such as God, omnipotence, sin, bliss, purity, salvation and damnation, that are all propelling Muslims into strategies of togetherness. Those who are closest to their socio-religious practices, their Judeo-Christian mirror-image, are by contrast their greatest cultural adversaries. In the Judeo-Christian master narrative, social cohesion is projected in times past, an era when all citizens basically were sharing the same set of beliefs, norms and traditions. This nostalgic concept Oion of culture is directed especially against Islam. Although there are many lenient devotees in scriptural-oriented monotheisms who show great tolerance for each other, the political force that does not reduce Muslims to second-rang citizens and which allows them the legal space to deploy their religious group synthesis are the non-cultural secularists who protect their critics as well: their only true allies are those who, in accordance with the freedom of expression, allow their despisers the legal space to reprint the Muhammad caricatures ^(ŽIŽEK 2016, 27).

The building of mosques, the call to prayer, dress codes, gender inequality, anti-integration pronouncements by ultra-orthodox imams and Islam-inspired extremism are all popular subjects that media decry as *Fremdkörper* in Europe. Especially where Europe is conceptualized as the stockroom for transnational Judeo-Christian identity, islamophobia sets the tone ^(MODODOO 2013, 41). The transnational identity formation is processed in modalities of exclusion that are voiced in feverish phantasmagorias of ‘the enemy’. Islamophobia is tinged with racialization ^(BATTANISI 2007, 111-2), since Judeo-Christian identification is liable to shade off into support for European nation-states as cultural communities of whites. Colour, that is, eventually trumps religion. In Europe, racialization is fed by a backlash against cultural diversity in which the positions of left and right mirror when Judeo-Christian motifs are ventilated in populist phraseology across the political spectrum.

Against the Islamophobic racialization of Islam, two points must be stressed. First, cultural critics of Islamic group synthesis are ignoring the democratic predisposition of non-cultural secularism at the very moment when many of democracy’s fundamentals —egalitarianism, fundamental rights— can serve as a weapon against an unconstitutional usurpation of public space by socio-religious practices. A religious ban on pork shall be without prejudice to the fifteen best places for a pulled pork in Europe. Second, there is nothing in non-cultural secularism that presses an attack on religion as a generality; it only focuses on the compatibility between socio-religious practices and the fundamentals of liberal democracy. Since jihad-terrorism, female genital mutilation, and honour killings are blatant violations of the democratic ideals of the polity, these socio-religious practices will be banned not because they are foreign to Europeanness, but because they are against criminal law. By reason of non-cultural secularism, however, the building of mosques, the call to prayer, dress codes, and anti-integration pronouncements by ultra-orthodox imams will be tolerated as socio-religious practices that condition present-day cultural diversity in Europe. If group synthesis imposes the burqa by violence, it is that violence that ought to be prosecuted. Otherwise, it falls in the same category of being culturally obliged by socio-religious practices to wearing garments like hats, yarmulkes, gloves, veils, djellabas or suits ^(NUSSBAUM 2012, 125-6).

To recap briefly my main argument, non-cultural secularism has its relevance only in context; as indicated above, it is a stance to be taken about religion. What a stipulation of non-cultural secularism makes sharply visible is the freedom of establishing meaningful collectivities in social-religious practices that run against a cultural majority capable of acts of elision and domination. To some, religious group synthesis might be an indispensable way of making life bearable. To others, the persistence of socio-religious practices may be less malleable than strategies of cultural management suggest. Religious group synthesis can yet not be dismissed as if it were some denim cut that is no longer in fashion. Even in most individualistic orientations in what is most superficially understood as ‘belief’, religion comprises instances of intersubjectivization of actual concerns that still shape and are shaped by knowledge, experience, and compassion. In that sense, the protean Islamic concept of togetherness —umma— can be interpreted as an ecumene that makes itself felt in religious group synthesis at local, translocal, and global levels ^(SALVATORE 2016, 10). In Islamic ecumene, actual concerns are co-conditioned by colonial subjugation, multinational exploitation, immoral embargos, racializing attitudes towards Muslim migrants in the EU, and, added to that, miseries in Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, just to mention the most poignant conflict zones. It is the recurrence of these things that may give European Muslims the stamina to steadfastly distinguish themselves in socio-religious practices from those whom they deem to be the hypocritical stakeholders of cultural Europeanness ^(RAMADAN 2009).

Now once again, in conclusion: why bother about their presence? Whatever the implications of being personally committed to Muslim group synthesis for any single European citizen would

be, they have one thing in common: every personal commitment pertains to the persistent expressiveness of socio-religious practices within the bounds of the democratic polities of all European citizens. So yes, public manifestations of socio-religious practices are due to the same non-cultural secularism that grants the cultural despisers of Islamic group synthesis a legal room to castigate Muslims for sharing socio-religious practices in public. But no, cultural criticism against stigmatizing garments is no legal ground for telling a Dutch Muslima in burqa to refrain from persisting in the expressiveness of religious group synthesis —even if her personal commitment to Islam involves her compliance with what she readily considers to be exemplary of Muslim dress codes amidst a crowd of Christmas shoppers on main street Coolsingel, in front of the Rotterdam town hall, where local authorities are at loggerheads over ever stricter regularizations of public manifestations of Islamic group synthesis. ●

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Safe Is A Place On Coming Closer In A Classroom

Esma Moukhtar

1

One’s own lived experience, respectfully related to that of others, remains for me the best foundation for social vision, of which art is a significant part. Personal associations, education, political and environmental contexts, class and ethnic backgrounds, value systems and market values, all exert their pressures on the interaction between eye, mind and image.

LUCY LIPPARD (1990)

ESMA MOUKHTAR

SAFE IS A PLACE

ON COMING CLOSER IN A CLASSROOM

NO PARADISE

What does it mean to be a student; one should ask oneself, especially when teaching. After about fifteen years of doing so, at this academy and elsewhere, I am still learning and at time puzzled about what happens in classrooms. That the people in my class are willing to explore their talents and ambitions, and that they sometimes think they can learn something from me, is one thing. Every year I become more aware of another thing; that there is a very intimate aspect of coming together in a room; that it is not only about sharing information, standardized knowledge and skills, but also, maybe mostly, about how we relate to one another, how we care, or not. And I ask myself often whether I care too much or too little.

We share a place and time, and it happens that we don’t know each other that well or at all. But a class of students to whom I talk is not a general ‘public’. They have been selected in all sorts of ways before they enter and we will be around each other for a while. Neither are they a circle of friends that automatically share their private matters, to whom I am a temporal guest or intruder, nor will we become real friends, or at least not as long as we are related as student and teacher.

In between the physical public and private sphere outside the academy, there is ‘the personal’ or ‘the intimate’, that can easily be overlooked or denied within the classroom. We might hardly know each other but the way we think, talk and work, comes for a huge part from within, so without knowing we exchange personal things and touch each other on several levels of our personality. Shouldn’t we know better with whom we are doing this?

Picture a classroom, filled with mainly white students and here and there a couple of ‘other faces’. In fact, all of them could have come from anywhere, born here or just arrived in this country to study. Behind each face lives a story, and although the majority is familiar with each other’s (western) background and the system that has always supported them, some stories are more different than others and some students more equal than the rest.

‘So what?’ a voice in the back of my mind said when I first began, ‘we all have four, five or even more senses. We have our hands, brains and heart, so why does it matter, for what we do here in this classroom , to which background you belong? I thought it was a way of treating everybody equally if I more or less ignored particular origins or possible issues. Yet, with every assignment, these backgrounds and alleged identities kept popping up as if it needed to come out this way, if not otherwise. And I admit, this would annoy at times. Forget about it, I thought, now that we are here, try to concentrate on something else; something that has nothing to do with any identity you might hold on to. You can think and study whatever you choose but I wanted to believe and wished to think that personal, artistic and intellectual growth are totally exclusive to one’s sex, gender, colour, class, health and whatever else we have. And in thinking so, I guess I confused wishing with knowing, and what should be with what is.

Being a student, when I was one, I had the impression that going to college meant ‘to step as far as I could out of who I am and what I (think I) know already in order to be really open to new ideas and concepts.’ Aren’t we equal in following the same course? It wasn’t relevant what life I had, and I didn’t think of identity. I couldn’t care less; if at all. It was private stuff, nothing more.

Once though, a professor came to me after class, to compliment me on my Dutch: it was so well developed for a Moroccan girl. He was interested and trying to be nice, so I laughed, but what if I was that girl he projected onto me? Would I have appreciated the compliment? And now that I wasn’t, why hadn’t he first asked me a thing or two? It wasn’t maybe relevant that I’m technically half Egyptian, born in Rotterdam, raised by my Dutch mother and her parents in a small village in the country, since my father died when I was nearly five, and that I never learned to speak Arabic, unfortunately, but I told

him anyway, we moved on to something else and that was about it.

Besides the reoccurring question ‘where are you actually from’ I never felt bothered by not being as Dutch and as white as the rest, nor was I proud of that Dutch part or of the other half for that matter. I didn’t feel as exotic as I looked but I had more important things on my mind and on my list. But I now realize that it has been a luxury, not really having to care about this particular or another aspect of my identity, because I have always had the feeling that it was never used or working against me. It seems that (an aspect of) identity becomes more important as it comes under pressure. I think I felt ‘included’ enough to not bother. Good for me, then, I would say, but I cannot project this privilege onto everyone in my class today.

When you feel included where you want to be, you can say: “Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same” like Foucault did in his introduction to **The Archaeology of Knowledge** (1969), or: “I have to change to stay the same” as Willem de Kooning had put it more than ten years earlier and repeats it every day when one enters the academy at Blaak, where his words adorn the facade.

But, in order to change, you must have had, somehow, the opportunity to get a sense of ‘self’ and an identity that is not ignored, marginalized or problematized by others. It seems more of a privilege to be able to change and not having to deal with the question or wanting to answer who you are and where you are from.

When you are confronted with circumstances of rejection, oppression or exclusion, you might say:

‘Ask me who I am and let me be that way. I don’t need to change to become who I am.’

Some might think we live in a paradise where we can choose who we are, think and say what we want and that identity is no longer an issue. Still, straight white male normativity inhabits that liberal paradise and seldom do we realize what the privileges are of those who fit into the prefabricated structures of western society.

Is being a woman, being gay, or being a person of colour non-conforming to gender binaries or rather, is it a combination of all these and other variations that are walking around or sitting in our classrooms *really* unproblematic for everyone? You might say: are we, after about three feminist waves, a few so-called postcolonial decades and their identity politics, the many coloured movements, gay pride parades and gender-fuck parties, not done with all that? Can’t we speak now of a post-identity era, in which we have to move onwards, focus on common crises, projects and goals and forget about our personal attachments to or searches for identities, or not?

It is about time we add an extra ‘post’ behind ‘post-identity’ like we put another post to ‘postmodernism’, ‘postcolonial’, ‘post-feminism’, ‘post-blackness’, ‘post gender’ and ‘post-critical’. Maybe we are ‘post free’ and back to these issues, since we are obviously not done yet – the Trump era started long before this curious candidate was president-elect. We still live in a climate that whether consciously or not, still continues to deny a certain past, which prevents us from coming to terms with the inevitable and abject consequences of our history: blunt racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia and xenophobia in (popular) politics, (social) media and academia.

her having to leave this nice, innocent and tolerant little country, because of all that is happening to Wekker now, after the ‘reception’ of *her* book. But that doesn’t prevent her from continuing her job, here or elsewhere, and that day she gave the Maagdenhuis stage of the University of Amsterdam back to Essed. In a very calm and clear way Essed formulated her questions about today’s neoliberal market, how this white male model rules our educational and cultural institutes and how ‘profit’ doesn’t take into account who we are, the lives that we carry around when we come together in a room, and why we should be more aware of the many ways in which we tend to see, name and exclude one another.

It reminded me of what I had read in **Citizen, an American Lyric**. In this painful and powerful book, poet, essayist and playwright Claudia Rankine tells us brief stories, reports and thoughts on daily ‘casual’ forms of racism, written from the perspective of a black American, of herself and other people, things that we think we know but don’t, or things we don’t want to know but should. The relationship with identity is a troubled one: on the one hand, it seems a burden, on the other, it needs to be acknowledged before you can forget or be fluid about it. Rankine tells me, teaches me in a way, page by page of her poetic prose via compacted experiences, what it is to be continuously reminded of the colour of your skin and how difficult it is to speak out, to say “I”

Sometimes “I” is supposed to hold what is not there until it is. Then what is comes apart the closer you are to it.

This makes the first person a symbol for something.

The pronoun barely holding the person together.

Someone claimed we should use our skin as wallpaper knowing we couldn’t win.

You said “I” has so much power; it’s insane.

WE STILL LIVE IN A CLIMATE THAT, CONSCIOUSLY OR NOT, STILL CONTINUES TO DENY A CERTAIN PAST

2

Certainly there are very real differences between us, of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions that result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation.

AUDRE LORDE (1990)

EVERYDAY

In June 2016, in a packed Maagdenhuis in Amsterdam, proudly introduced by Gloria Wekker, I heard Philomena Essed speak about exclusion and everyday racism. I hadn’t started reading Wekker’s **White Innocence** (2016) yet, neither had I heard of Essed herself. Maybe because after she published her book **Alledaags racism** (1984)/**Everyday Racism** (1990), about Dutch racism, she literally had to flee from a wave of hatred her studies evoked within academia and media in Holland. She touched upon the blind spots of our nation; spots that have made everyday racism invisible for us, and as an effect this also made Essed more and more invisible for us too. Now that Wekker raises these questions again, whether we can go on with the denial and disavowal of our violent colonial past and our current racist present, it still turns out to be a job that makes critical thinkers like

very use of these words, whether they can be related to a certain essence or not. Butler tends to suggest that such essences leading to essentialism do not exist, but we keep the idea of essence alive by the words we speak and which in turn, define and identify others and ourselves. This also contributes to explaining the persistence of binary oppositions.

It is not about sharpening these oppositions even further, nor is it to find grey consensus – it is about consciousness and understanding of what it is to be (not) white. Whether we are amongst those who we identify or feel solidary with, or feel confronted with others who act in a strange way, we have to speak out about what touches, frightens, and oppresses us, with vulnerable faith that the other will actually listen.

The ‘I’ needs to speak when it dares to. When it is able to step out of its shame, but “it never speaks fully alone by itself”, Essed said towards the end of her talk. There are so many experiences of

THE ‘I’ NEEDS TO SPEAK WHEN IT DARES TO

injustice and exclusion, and yet, nobody is really alone, she emphasized; nobody ever did anything completely by him-or herself.

“Who in this room did everything alone?” She was addressing the question to us. One woman raised her hand. “No, really?” She replied with an incredulous look. And the hand pulled back, doubtfully.

That we are always in one way or another connected, we cannot repeat too often, Essed seemed to stress.

After her lecture, four young academics took a seat next to Essed. Each of them with their name badges sketched their own complex background and story in a couple of sentences, followed by a comment from their individual perspective as to what was touched upon, plus a question for Essed. They were all very moved for obvious reasons, and when the last and perhaps the youngest woman emphasized how overwhelming it was for her to finally hear all these things being made explicit, she became so emotional that halfway into one of her bright and smart articulations she got stuck and froze in the heat of what went on.

Sitting third row I could see her face and the intensity of her inward gaze, I felt the electricity in the air and held my breath. The words weren’t able to come out, it seemed as if there was too much in the way that wanted to get out first. She was fighting back tears, flicked with her hands as if to scare away what had always pursued her, and now overtook her as it discharged.

Towards the second minute of this, Philomena walked up to the girl, said something to her, inaudible for the rest of the audience, and laid a hand on her shoulder till she calmed down and was able to continue her speech, preliminary to her question. It was about how

her parents and theirs and now she, how friends and others, what is was like, still is, to be poor, subordinated, excluded and humiliated and how maybe one day, ever, things could be different and that *WE*, in schools and in academia, in politics and in art *CAN* and *SHOULD DO* something, that we *ALL* have a part in this.

From these moments after the lecture, from what these women were experiencing and sharing I think I learned so much because I could hear someone talk and was able to see her face and relate to what was told, via the embodiment of this knowledge and emotions. In the laborious process of dealing with each other, we need this too. At the same time, it can be too much asked to talk about these painful experiences again and again. What can we do?

You cannot leave it to the oppressed to teach the oppressor about their mistakes, to paraphrase the poet, activist and feminist writer, Audre Lorde, in her paper **Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference**, 1980 (reproduced in 1984 for Sister Outsider, a collection of her essays). We cannot simply ask others to tell us time and again what we did wrong. It is already painful and vulnerable enough.

“There is a constant drain of energy, which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future” Lorde argues. It is (also) up to white people and teachers to educate themselves about the system that they are supporting, which is the exclusive system that has always supported them.

^[1] I had to flee from a wave of hatred her studies evoked within academia and media in Holland

^[2] I had to flee from a wave of hatred her studies evoked within academia and media in Holland

Professors must genuinely value every-one’s presence. There must be ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic. These contributions are resources. Used constructively they enhance the capacity of any class to create an open learning community.

BELL HOOKS (1994)

THE PERSONAL

Besides self-education and teaching about problematic past traditions and current systems, we have to deal with diversity when we are working together in a group of people with all sorts of histories. How exactly do we deal? We, at least I tend to, project easily ‘same’ and ‘other’ to the faces we talk to. When you are searching for ‘the same other’ from the perspective of being ‘othered’ yourself, these alliances can help you to survive in an unsafe place. You identify easier with those you feel most familiar with. From the perspective of someone who never needs to think about his or her own safety and feels represented automatically, maybe unintended, without knowing you can treat these ‘other faces’ differently in a distorted way. Why don’t we, to learn about the stories behind those faces and to make the personal aspect of being in a room more explicit, ask each other who we are and where we come from, what we are interested in, to make a start?

Not to label ourselves, but to learn about each other’s backgrounds, experiences, differences and similarities, to hear and tell something about you, me and ‘the rest’. What looks familiar might be a complex story and what seems exotic could surprise me as ordinary – it makes sense to share a bit more than you think you need to know and to give everyone a voice. It is the only way to find out that we are not all coming from the same place and that there are different possible directions of where we can be going. We need to know with whom we are talking and working in the classroom.

So that is what we maybe should start with, when we meet a new group of students, to create an atmosphere together in which things can be shared and supported. And then gradually, they might feel safe enough to bring in more personal examples and views during discussions about whatever the subject is, in which ‘the world’ and ‘identity’, are often very close by. There is a lot going on beneath the surface of their presence and I think we should dare to let the personal (to a certain extent) in, to handle difficult moments, to face tension and see it as a chance to come closer. We need to let things happen that might ‘not fit in class’ and do some ‘emotional labour’. We are not just rational beings with equal needs and chances, with common goals and skills, some just ‘more qualified’ than others.

Whether you teach or learn how to make things or to think and reflect further, no student in any academy is just there as a student. And especially between walls where art and creative making and thinking are supposed to take place and to be developed, personality or the personal is never far away from the process.

It speaks for itself that each student is a person. So is the one who teaches. The latter might be older, a bit wiser, more experienced maybe, but besides being students and teachers, we are people with personal, cultural, and intellectual baggage.

To be a student means first and foremost and in contrast to what I used to believe, that you bring to the foreground: who you are and what you know by experience. You, as an “educator”, bring your life to class: your body, your incorporated systems, understandings and misunderstandings. You have a history of experiences – an archive of all kinds of knowledge and affects. It might be a somewhat messy archive, but still, to be a whole person requires to be taken seriously as such.

In order to temporally step aside from who you think you are, and what you think or know, you need to be acknowledged first, for who you are: a person with a certain cultural background, particular experiences, problems, traumas maybe,

WHAT LOOKS FAMILIAR MIGHT BE A COMPLEX STORY AND WHAT SEEMS EXOTIC COULD SURPRISE ME AS ORDINARY

besides all of the qualities and ambitions that you are here for.

When I, as a teacher, accept that students bring their life to the classroom, I will also find out that there are many issues with identity, next to false projections of identity-based on assumptions, prejudices and privileges that none of us is ever fully aware of, and which often prevent us from fully trusting each other and really working together. Even at an art academy, where people are supposed to work in more autonomous or less authoritarian ways, it happens that some students are not given a voice and that their teacher is not noticing that s/he speaks too much or leaves too little room for active participation and so on. Also, teachers are carrying the archives that they are ‘fixed in’, and the theories, histories and patterns that we teach or implicitly pass on are maybe not all that open to other stories.

In his article ‘Realizing a More Inclusive Pedagogy’ (the afterword of a collection of essays published in 2003 under the title **Race and Higher Education**, of which he was the editor together with Annie Howell) Frank Tuitt responds to conventional teaching and the effects of exclusion of students from marginalized groups and in general of students that are dominated by others. Whether they are treated with lesser attention or too much stereotypical assumption, traditional academic models often cause an environment that does not welcome everyone and is unable to give every student a chance to have a voice, to participate and to excel.

The article was recommended to me when I was about to finish this essay, and I spoke about it to a colleague who is more informed about these matters than I am; ‘you should read this’, she said and sent it to me. If I had joined earlier Brown Bag Lunches at the Academy, I would have known by now what it was about, but anyway, I was happy to read that what I tried to think about was already done by others so well, and thought of Essed’s point: you are never doings things all by yourself. So, Tuitt summarizes and proposes a set of tools that together could form an inclusive pedagogy. It is based on the connected ideas of a range of critical thinkers such as the above quoted bell hooks (born Gloria Jean Watkins, renamed herself after her maternal great grandmother, without capitals because “the message was more important than the messenger”) with her book **Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom** (1994), to which Tuitt refers a lot.

Elements of the inclusive model to address all students as whole beings, are (and it comes with no surprise): sharing power, instead of an authoritarian professor in control of power and knowledge; a dialogical relation between students and teacher, in which personal stories can be exchanged and connected to the subject matter; giving each of them a voice and the acknowledgement that they can speak in multiple ways; to personalize subject matter with examples from their own history; a learning based environment in which both students and teachers are responsible for constructing knowledge and where beliefs and value systems can be discussed, re-examined, especially the dominant systems; transparency of the method and goals, as to create trust and safety in the diverse classroom.

“WE WANT TO BE NEUTRAL”. NEUTRAL? BETWEEN? WHAT? AND TO WHOM WOULD ‘WE’ WANT TO EXPRESS THIS?

All these elements can help students to create meaning and to find power as a person, connected to other students and teachers who are vulnerable people too.

Diversity or inclusivity does not just mean, as it might me clear in the mean time, to have a few students or teachers of colour and a few gay and perhaps one transperson in class. It also means to explore what that means, and to empathize before you can start to combine what you, teacher or student, know and who you are, with what is new. To connect what you feel with what you meet, hear, see and discover in your encounters with others, through works, thoughts and texts that challenge our binary and oppressing systems responsible for the division between ‘self’ and ‘other’.

To step aside for a while and not, in defence, hold on to who you are and what you know, to change your mind or to bridge a gap, cannot be forced, it can only happen. And it can only happen when one feels safe. Since we can’t ask from everyone to bring a ‘safe feeling’ to the academy, the academy has to offer it, not as a vague feeling or assumption, but as a place to go and stay in.

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.

BELL HOOKS (1994)

FREEDOM, DIFFERENCE AND SOLIDARITY

Lately, some students and teachers were upset and angry with their school not willing to hang out the rainbow flag on ‘coming out day’. It was explained as: ‘we want to be neutral’. Neutral? Between? What? And to whom would ‘we’ want to express this?

Being neutral suggests: between two oppositions. Is there a reasonable opposite to being ‘pro freedom and civil rights’? You cannot be publicly against the laws of our constitution, I guess. Hanging out the rainbow at an academy on ‘coming out day’ symbolizes sympathy with those who still feel not safe to come out. Nothing else. So in order to be safe, we don’t want to make this gesture for those people in our community to feel safe enough to come out as something within the LGBTQ.spectrum (if they hadn’t already) and to welcome them as much as others?

The rainbow is of many colours unless of course if you are colour-blind, and this flag refers to all people who identify as gay or queer. It is a flag that celebrates the non-nation of united people that have in common that they are not (as) straight as everyone else and it does not exclude anyone. In every culture, this way of loving and living is existent, whether accepted or not. Expressing sympathy with queer people worldwide does not exclude nations, religions, communities or whatsoever; it only excludes intoler-

ance, oppression and violence. So, does hanging out a flag like this implicate another, implicit flag, which expresses antipathy with those who cannot sympathize with the rainbow; that hanging out the rainbow is a provocation of a certain kind?

Sure, LGTBQ rights have been appropriated too often to defend ‘our freedom’ as a way to tell the rest, and a very specific part of ‘the rest’, the *other* others, that if they cannot live with it, then they should ‘just leave’. But does this disqualify every single gesture? If there is an occasion for another flag, for a different case to embrace, we should hang that flag too. Or hang out all the flags we need, permanently.

When we are afraid that some people in or outside of the academy might feel uncomfortable by the rainbow, which does not by itself, provoke or elicit anyone, and withdraw the gesture because it could be interpreted wrongly – then ‘neutral’ would mean something that looks more like we stand for nothing. I feel that this makes ‘neutral’ chanceless for making any sense. Thus what we need for future situations is further discussion about why no flag, then, and on a longer term, if needed, attempts to see whether people can still defend their belief system *and* tolerate convictions and actions that seem to resonate with that system in a conflicting way. Maybe there is no real conflict after all. It takes time to solve or overcome contradictions that might turn out being paradoxes. Apparently, we are not there yet, but what keeps us from moving along? As long as we don’t feel safe, we stay antagonists and suspicious, we let the distances grow and keep shouting to the other side or simply give up talking.

Instead of being neutral or colour-blind an academy or university should take a leading role in addressing questions about whiteness, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and to make a difference in a culture that still tends to deny differences and privileges. When we invite students and teachers with all sorts of cultural backgrounds, it can happen sometimes that we surprise each other with mutual friction or even a total lack of understanding. To express sympathy with a specific group of students and teachers does not equal disrespect to the rest. So shouldn’t we make any form of solidarity explicit, because the one solidarity might contradict the other? Or can solidarity also mean to understand and not reject those who cannot share the very same values at this point right now? Can it be specific and inclusive at the same time?

A pragmatist concept of solidarity, as Richard Rorty describes it in **Contingency, irony and solidarity** (1989), suggests “that our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as ‘one of us’, where ‘us’ means something smaller and more local than the human race.” And “this tendency to feel closer to those with whom imaginative identification is easier is deplorable, a temptation to be avoided.” From the perspective of ethical universalism, we should not differentiate.

Yet, Rorty’s position “entails that feelings of solidarity are necessarily a matter of which similarities and dissimilarities strike us as salient (...)” but this position “is not incompatible with urging that we try to extend our sense of ‘we’ to people whom we have previously thought of as ‘they’”.

ESMA MOUKHTAR
SAFE IS A PLACE

WOKA MAKES
A DIFFERENCE
READER 2017

of what our projects should be about and how to approach the themes that we are working with, together. How we conceptualize and visualize them, in reference to Lippard’s “interaction between eye, mind and image”.

Finally, to end with some words by Frantz Fanon, from **Black Skin, White Masks** (1952): “Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other?”

What our eyes see, whether we can tell what we see and why we think and feel this way, are what we should care about the most now, to share and to broaden our views and visions in order to connect and to come closer. When we think of the classroom, the working floor, the station or atelier, not only as a space for knowledge and skills but also as a place to feel safe enough for both teachers and students of all kinds, to express and discuss, to become aware of our privileges, to redeem innocence

for consciousness and care, to offer and accept room for voice. Only then we can learn together and produce knowledge and meaning beyond the long outdated systems of power. And only then academic diversity can be more than just a diverse bunch of people in a neutral building. Otherwise, we fail ourselves as educators and students, and even more important our future generations. ●

26

ESMA MOUKHTAR
SAFE IS A PLACE

It is not about forgetting differences but to see them as less important than “the similarities with respect to pain and humiliation – the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of ‘us’”.

The opposite then of being neutral is not partiality but saying: this is also ‘we’. And to defend those who cannot defend some of our values is to include them still as one of us, because we happen to live in communities in which contradictions and paradoxes happen to exist. When we teach students that an important part of their future lies in how they deal with others and our planet, we must deal with all of them and learn from all of them, why they feel the way they feel.

We need more talks and dialogues in small groups, personal stories connected to points of discussions in which we stimulate each other to more critical, queer and creative thinking about our choices, traditions, roles and capacities. Art and life, work and living are inseparable, which also means: open to mutual development and change, but not for everyone equally open. Since chances are not always distributed well, the awareness and emotional understanding of race, class, gender and other axes of inequality that we have to face from a condition for access to this development.

We can imagine and amplify a ‘we’ that actively works on inclusive binding instead of assuming that everyone is ‘in’ already, via continuous conversation and attention where needed. Instead of telling us things outside class, students (and teachers) should be encouraged to tell us more *in* class. To share power and experiences is, according to Tuitt, hooks and others, a proven way to become a group, in which discussion can take place with mutual trust, rather than to simply work together on one project after another without understanding each other or the relevance of the project.

We need to find out about our personal and cultural backgrounds and archives, to acknowledge certain differences and to realize the various benefits and obstacles that we carry with us. This requires research. It demands introspection. And it challenges us to talk more with experts within the field of cultural difference and inclusive teaching and curating: what do we teach, to whom, in which way and how should we open this up in a both critical and constructive manner? And the more we know, the better we may get a sense

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Everyone Has To Learn Everything Or Emotional Labor

Nana Adusei-Poku

“Minorities mark the beginning of their own enunciations by speaking from anxious places of disavowal—from the hollows of denial, or the traces of repressed contradictions.” (BHABHA 2015)

Cultural Diversity and Superdiversity are terms that have a close link to both educational and employment policies, as well as business strategies in Higher education.

A great amount of research has been produced in the global north over the past two decades, which emphasizes that social equity is yet to be achieved.

Art education is equally affected by the dilemma of trying to have inclusive policies and a diverse student body. Alongside this, it fails to address the long-established power structures that can be traced as far back as into the Imperialist Era. Research projects and agendas including **Art for a Few** (UK) 2009 or **Art School Differences** (CH) 2016 are only two examples of recent research in the field that show that a lot of work still needs to be done when it comes to minority students and teaching staff (with great emphasis on students with disabilities).

Whilst the end of Multiculturalism has now been officially declared, the gap between scholars who aim for Diversity politics (L.E.STEVN 2011) and voices that claim it as a failure could not be greater, and that it serves only White peoples’ conscious (L.E.BERREY 2015). The opposition hence argues that any such “inclusive” strategies and instrumentalisation of *Difference* within Higher education does not create equity,

27

WdKA MAKES
A DIFFERENCE
READER 2017

NANA ADUSEI-POKU

EVERYONE HAS TO LEARN EVERYTHING OR ON EMOTIONAL LABOR

but stress that the exploitation of adjunct teachers of color does not contribute to changing of the body of knowledge that is reproduced within Higher education (DIZON 2017). At the same time, is higher art education changing through a managerial turn and changing into corporate machines aiming to fuel the neoliberal Job market with young individualized and a politicised middle-class creatives (McROBBIE 2016).

Therefore, the question is how **not** to recreate models that are bound to fail again.

One of the key research findings that **Art School Differences** showed, was that there is a way to have a sustainable impact within the institution. The research design included several co-researching subgroups, which were consisting of teachers and students, who proposed individual research subjects (all tied to questions of Diversity), which were supervised and “trained” by the main researchers. This meant that the knowledge produced had an immediate impact on the students as well as the teachers and their various practices, it also created a Network of “like-minded” who created a snowball effect within the institution (VOEGELE, SANER AND VESSELY 2016). The research project **WdKA makes a Difference** had a similar but more small scale model which has had a comparable effect. This effect was achieved through the distribution of content concerning Critical Race, Gender, Queer, Post- and De-colonial Theory, subjects that were more often than none rejected from the lessons and courses. Conversations with students showed that these lessons had the greatest impact on them as individual creative beings in order to find a space for themselves within the school and in the world. Here, particularly minority students felt deeply empowered and acknowledged in their difference without feeling excluded. This effect would not have been possible if we would not have had critical conversations in reading groups and workshops with volunteering teachers on “inclusive pedagogy” and self-identity awareness. But some students also felt encouraged to further pursue artistic research in the field of Difference due to collaborating with and visting the Witte de With and the exhibition and framing program NO HUMANS INVOLVED which I curated. To expose the students to critical content produced by queer voices of color not only had a great impact on the number of diverse visitors at Witte de With, but it also introduced subjects that remain marginalized in a context such as Rotterdam.

The term decolonization is a buzzword in contemporary art and education discourses, but often it is not clear what decolonization means exactly. The way in which I use the term in this publication, is not just a metaphor, but is based on the way in which theorist Gabriele Dietze maps the field:

“Arturo Escobar, a contributor to the *Modernity/Colonialism Research Group* describes the program of *Decolonial Theory* as “another way of thinking that runs counter to the great modernist narratives (Christianity, Liberalism, Marxism); it locates its own inquiry in the very borders of systems of thought and reaches towards the possibility of non-Eurocentric modes of thinking” (2007, 180). From his point of view, a new understanding of modernity is needed,

based on the premise that modernity is unconceivable without colonialism. Escobar maintains that Eurocentrism as a regime of knowledge is “a confusion between abstract universality and the concrete world hegemony derived from Europe’s position as center” (2007, 184). She further elaborates: The underside of modernity is that it is convinced of a supposed European civilizational superiority, which must be established in other parts of the world, in their best interests, and by force if necessary. Ernesto Dussel calls this point of view a “developmentalist fallacy” (2000, 473). Theoreticians of decolonial thought such as Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and Ernesto Dussel declare that this orientation provides “another space for the production of knowledge [...], the very possibility of talking about the ‘worlds of knowledges otherwise’” (Escobar 2007, 180).” ^(DIETZE 2014, 253)

Hence, what Dietze presents here is how I understand decoloniality, it is an aim for a transformation of Eurocentric epistemologies, stressing the importance of the production of knowledge in different (local) geopolitical contexts and the necessity to create space for neglected epistemologies. To decolonize the curriculum and pedagogical practices, therefore, means to embrace the impossible. The impossible for me here is not related to bringing non-western epistemologies and content into established curricula and their related constructed canons. That would be an enterprise that could be established in a fairly short amount of time- but to convince University directors and teaching staff that these changes are quintessential to make a different future possible seems to be the impossible.

Like Esma Moukhtar in her essay **Safe is the Place** ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾, the impossible is related to the internal intellectual and emotional transformation processes that are needed within art schools to make decolonization and change possible. By this I mean the intricate self-motivated work that is necessary to understand one’s historically produced position in the world, particularly as a person with white privilege, which becomes even more complicated when that privilege is enhanced through being heterosexual, CIS Gender and many other categories and identity positions that fuel a suppressive normative order.

Decolonizing work is uncomfortable work and it is work that constantly challenges one’s comfort zone and can be at times so destabilizing, that it increases neglect, rejection and resistance.

This resistance can articulate itself in various forms, insufficient funding, rejection of research projects, social policing or refusal to hire staff that brings expertise in the fields that are invested in social change such as queer studies, postcolonial or decolonial theory all of which lead to systematic exclusion. I am emphasizing systemic, because as **Art School Differences** has repeatedly concluded, the desire for Diversity and Change is present within art schools but the work seems too uncomfortable to be consequentially pursued.

But that desire seems to be fuelled by the idea not having to do the work- and by this, I don’t mean programs in intercultural exchange, that have the tendency to exoticize the other and reproduce a status quo as Teana Boston-Mammah eloquently argues in her article **The entrance gap** ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾. “The work” means to start the reflection where it hurts the

of human and humanity, that places the category human outside of culture and subjectivity but allowed to claim numbers and statistics as a classificatory and ordering believe system. This means by reproducing an idea of objective knowledge production, we reproduce the foundations of our disciplines and ‘their hegemonic modes of economic rationality’. ^(WYNTER 1992, 52)

Yes, there are now additional courses at Willem de Kooning Akademie, that are called Cultural Diversity or electives, which address postcolonial theory or in other parts of the world there are entire departments dedicated to Black Studies, Postcolonial Studies or Queer Theory but further Wynter shares that the exceptionalism with which any subject is treated that involves the other” fuels into a white-washing of our institutions and curricula. ^(WYNTER 1992, 57)

Approaches that don’t confine with this modernity- which I argue have to be considered a practice rather than a static concept- are based on an understanding of learning as a holistic project, which is a threat to the establishment and questions your colleague’s mastery and knowledge base as well as the institutions credibility, importance and tradition.

In my classes I am often confronted with the question, “Why haven’t I learned about what Judith Butler called the Heterosexual-matrix, why did I never hear about Frantz Fanon, Silvia Wynter or Edouard Glissant earlier?” My course is often an elective, of course. I have previously argued that critical educators have to deal with a different form of racial time, meaning that there is a chronological dimension to our teaching ^(ADUSEI-POKU 2016). There is never enough time to catch up in one week with theories and practices, which will neither the teacher nor the students allow to go beyond the content presented and further and deepen the subject. There is no thriving; only a scratching on the surface of possibilities.

Since the content that I am presenting to the students is based on a foundational knowledge that has been produced by Feminists, Critical Race and Queer and Postcolonial Thinkers and Artists, which has a longstanding history.

Contemporary Education has therefore to be seen within the confines of

“the uneven global power structures defined by the intersections of neoliberal capitalism, racism, settler colonialism, immigration, and imperialism, which interact in the creation and maintenance of systems of domination, and dispossession, criminalization, expropriation, exploitation and violence that are predicated upon hierarchies of racialised, gendered, sexualized, economized, and nationalized social existence.”^(WEHELIYE, 2014,1)

Reading this quote by Alexander Weheliye, that so sharply points us readers to the heart of our contemporary dilemma, clarifies that contemporary education has to tackle with all of the mentioned aspects at ones- holistically, in order to create an understanding of our “planetary system” ^(SPIVAK 2012).

Nevertheless, this is the unthinkable and often desired outcome of critical educational approaches. But what does this mean as a practitioner and student? What kind of structures are necessary in order to be able to sufficiently teach “everything” and what kind of work comprises a decolonial process?

ON BEING A CARE WORKER TO BECOMING A SELF-CARING WORKER

When I started my position at the Willem de Kooning Academy I entered with high ambitions, I was promised free reign over the subject of Cultural Diversity. I was happy —I knew I was a token for the institution out of 57 Lectoren there are 3 people of Color and only one Black Woman, which is not an unusual number. I also knew that I was as a Black Queer Femme not as threatening to the institution because I was not a Black Dutch person. I knew that the work wouldn’t be an easy one and that I would go through a lot of traumatising experiences. I am emphasising my “foreigner” status because “homegrown” resistance is harder to cope with.

Being in the classroom and caring for my students consistently reminds me how much you have to give as a Black person in a space that reproduces one’s own racialised position in the world. Talking about Whiteness with White people is not pleasant- it is neither enriching nor enlightening and it is at times very draining. It is a very self-destructive work if you don’t manage to create an external support system through friends and family that support you to “deal” with the harsh realities that you are confronted with. The student’s positive feedback, however, is what keeps one going and creates hope and pleasure. Teaching critical race theory is, because of the great amount of emotional and intellectual labor, extremely skilled work, highly sensitive and demands expertise, which no diversity program can prepare you for. This is the work and education, which is an emotional one and this is an area, which

LEAVING EMOTIONAL LABOUR TO EDUCATORS OF COLOR IS PART OF THE PROBLEM OF DIVERSITY POLITICS, IT IS CARRIED BY SYSTEMIC RACISM

I see highly underestimated. The social change we need in times of global growth of populism in which racism, sexism and queer-phobia are rising involves emotional growth. So decolonial education is more than just introducing alternative epistemologies. The system how it functions right now, leaves the emotional waste work with those who are dedicated non-negotiators dealing with the thick layers of ignorance and privilege in and outside the classroom, in board meetings or in the private realm, a layer that is produced over centuries through white cultural hegemony. So one of my conclusions here is that to leaving Emotional labour to educators of color is part of the problem of Diversity politics, it is carried by systemic racism. For educators of color, this means to be caught in a violent cycle of resignation, frustration and precarity.

29 WOKA MAKES A DIFFERENCE READER 2017

“HISTORY, THE SMILER WITH THE KNIFE”

These elaborations may not be convenient or comfortable to read, but they are necessary to be pointed out. My accounts are also not singular. Michelle Sharp beautifully places on the basis of Sadia Hartman’s work the use of the personal narratives in her book **In the Wake: On Blackness and Being**, when she writes

“The “autobiographical example,” says Saidiya Hartman, “is not a personal story that folds onto itself; it’s not about navel-gazing, it’s really about trying to look at historical and social process and one’s own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them” (Saunders 2008b, 7). Like Hartman, I include the personal here, “to tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction” (Hartman 2008, 7). ^(SHARP, 2016)

Tamura Lomax a Scholar of Black Religion and Black Diaspora Studies, who recently published an article **Black Women’s Lives Don’t Matter in Academia Either, or Why I Quit Academic Spaces that Don’t Value Black Women’s Life and Labor** echoes my observations:

“Just as we should not close our eyes to the bound hands and economically free labor that literally built institutions of learning across the nation or the living flesh used in academic and scientific experimentation to advance the production of knowledge, we should not look the other way and ignore the overwhelming and present dependency on black women’s labor in the academic caste system, which excessively utilizes black and women of color as the mules of higher learning — and that black and women of color, in turn, participate in as one of many means to survive. We cannot turn a blind eye to this push and pull or how it creates an illiberal power structure of oppression based survival. I should note that I am emphatically not suggesting that academia is a slave economy or that black women faculty are slaves. I am, however, arguing that the current structure operates along oppressing racial and gender lines and that should give those of us who care about justice in real life pause.” ^(LOXMAN 2015)

Whilst I was conducting my research on the subject of emotional labor by Black Women I found many personal accounts from the US to Europe beginning with enslaved women as Nannies for White Children and how this History continues due to systemic racism (I.E. WALLACE-SANDERS 2008) —but “I have to emphasise that the personal is institutional” as the theorist Sarah Ahmed points out on her recent resignation statement. In the reading sessions of **WdKA makes a Difference** in preparation for this publication a central question came up- who are we writing for? I am trained to write for White people and to explain and make my arguments resistant to hegemonic critique, but in this text I want to pose two question for educators of color: How do we measure the success of our own work, which tries to develop self-awareness in students, if we lose our self-worth in the process? How can we lose the fear of speaking out? I ask the latter with Audre Lorde. How do we shake off the trauma in the classroom and implement holistic approaches of self-care within the institutions instead of compartmentalizing it as a private matter —as if your depression is detached from the violence that one experiences on a daily basis as a person of color? The answer to myself is not to remain silent, even if this means to be labelled “angry” or as in the case of HR “Zwarte Piet” and maybe to leave the institution at some point behind.

What I also did not take into consideration in the beginning of my position, were the structural, systemic as well as emotional walls that I would encounter. Because social and systemic change won’t happen via work on policies but “You can change policies without changing anything. You can change policies in order not to change anything” (AHMED 2016). Institutions also can deny research funding and provide no structural support in order not to change anything, one’s own work can either become “too academic” or “not academic enough”.

In conclusion, the walls that I encountered are thick and even more troubling is that I encountered them on various different levels. Neoliberal Universities —have adjunct professors, lecturers on short time contracts or one semester engagements in order to let people, who have been doing the work for centuries to do the care work again —which allows institutions not to deal with their own business- with the sheer unbearable impossible task to deal with their white privilege.

EPILOGUE— PRECARIOUS RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

Sarah Ahmed asked quintessential questions at the end of her resignation letter **Resignation is a Feminist Issue** to Goldsmiths College London; I think these questions are important to ask for everyone who is working in this field and that call for a revisioning of our ethics and integrity. Otherwise one remains complicit with an abusive system.

“But what if we do this work and the walls stay up? What if we do this work and the same things keep coming up? What if our own work of exposing a problem is used as evidence there is no problem? Then you have to ask yourself: can I keep working here? What if staying employed by an institution means you have to agree to remain silent about what might damage its reputation?” (AHMED 2016) ●

30

NANA ADUSEI-POKU
ON EMOTIONAL LABOR

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