

#ZWARTMANIFEST

OUR DREAMS WILL BE ONLY BRIEFLY UNSPOTTED FROM THE WORLD

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ZWART MANIFEST
'OP WEG NAAR ZWARTE EMANCIPATIE'

www.zwartmanifest.nl

ZWART MANIFEST – OP WEG NAAR ZWARTE EMANCIPATIE

In juni 2020 gingen meer dan 50.000 mensen de straat op in alle provincies van Nederland tijdens de #BlackLivesMatter protesten. De afgelopen tien jaar is er met de anti-zwarte piet beweging een beweging ontstaan die een vuist heeft gemaakt tegen institutioneel en anti-zwart racisme. Het besef groeit dat ook Nederland worstelt met zijn eigen erfenis van het koloniale verleden en dat dit aangepakt moet worden.

HET ZWART MANIFEST

Vanuit deze beweging is het Zwart Manifest ontstaan: een 'levend document' met concrete adviezen en eisen van en voor Zwarte gemeenschappen over het aanpakken van racisme en ongelijkheid in verschillende sectoren zoals het onderwijs, de arbeidsmarkt en kunst en cultuur.

Lees het via: www.zwartmanifest.nl.

De strijd om diepgewortelde structuren van ongelijkheid te doorbreken is een veelzijdige strijd en strekt zich uit tot alle terreinen van het maatschappelijk leven. Hoe kunnen we diepgewortelde structuren van ongelijkheid doorbreken? Wat is de rol van kunstenaars, creatievelingen en schrijvers om verandering teweeg te brengen? Hoe kunnen we samen de beweging in gang houden om het Zwart Manifest te manifesteren?

Het manifesteren van het manifest

Kunstenaars Chimira Obiefule, Rossel Chaslie en het duo Jonathan Hoost en Youandi hebben op een creatieve manier uiting gegeven aan het manifest. Schrijvers Akú Anan, Bart Krieger, Jillian Emanuels, Mungayende Helene Christelle, Phaedra Haringsma, Princess Attia & Sherilyn Deen schreven vanuit verschillende perspectieven over Zwarte gemeenschappen in Nederland. Het ruimtelijk ontwerp is gemaakt door Setareh Noorani en Jelmer Teunissen.

De expositie is het resultaat van de open call 'Manifesting Systemic Change Through Creative Waves', georganiseerd door Nederland Wordt Beter, New Urban Collective/The Black Archives en Black Queer & Trans Resistance NL in samenwerking met BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht.

OUR DREAMS WILL BE ONLY BRIEFLY UNSPOTTED FROM THE WORLD

Dredging the Delta, an Introduction

We're shadows made of bright candescent colors traversing through this delta that is the Netherlands. In this land, whoever we are is distorted by falsehoods made up in the eyes of the beholder. At times we're considered helpful, resilient, or an easy aesthetic, then the next, we're criminal, savage, or infantile. We're living in a state of suspense awaiting affirmative glimpses of our existence in the everyday yt smile at the Albert Heijn, the police car that simply drives by us, or the frat-boy who isn't calling us slurs and checking his pockets frantically as they pass us. We're whatever the creeks springing from its rivers, the humid grey sky, or monostylistic architecture reflects on us: a shadow trapped in a colonial backwater with no purpose beyond assimilation and its tantalizing promise of belonging. Our presence is unwanted, unloved, and historically enabling our bodily exploitation and social humiliation. If not for colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, we would never have set foot on this unflattering flat farmland devoid of significant cultural artifacts predating imperial conquest. The Dutch, a fragile people living until 100 years ago mostly without indoor plumbing, who glorify the breadcrumbs they receive from the 10%-elites' genocidal colonial conquests out of spite for having had to eat carrots and raw fish every single day, for centuries. If our predicament forces a retelling of who we are, we exist entrapped in a Stockholm syndrome scenario like birds in an imaginary cage. A rare nugget of pre-imperial wisdom we ought to make sense of is that: *"hebban olla uogala nestas hagunnan hinase hi(c) (e)nda thu uuat unbidan uue nu."* Translating loosely the oldest written Dutch sentence reads: *"All birds have begun nesting, except you and me. What are we waiting for?"*

In this essay, I urge the Black community in the Netherlands to begin nesting anew in unchartered territory of Blackness. A violent shift in focus is needed to enable Black liberation that is self-directional, sustainable, and does not hinge on the degrees of whiteness we can coalesce.

Boosting a reorientation toward radical freedom requires us to sever any dreams from state-oriented whiteness and celebrate visibility among exclusively the Black community and invisibility in whiter society. The locus of prestige, celebration, affirmation, and success should exist among ourselves and demand inward recognition. Being visible to the indigenous people of the Netherlands is an unimaginative arm-wrestling where we subject our identities to constant negotiation and assault. Visibility can be a distortion of truth, diluting what's real or framed to enable ulterior motives. Ultimately, visibility can estrange us from ourselves in the eye of the beholders to whom our visibility is a mere reflection of their most sinister colonial echoes of centuries long gone. Opting for what Typhoon delivers in a spoken word: *"immediate action instead of gradual change... Feel welcomed in our generation. When I say ours, I say: Black. White. Brown"* - will just grant us perhaps fleeting moments of existence in the big yt world. Yet, fleeting should never be our existence, nor is existing alongside yts as our overarching objective for Black liberation. We ought to freely dream about uncompromised liberated Black futures which are unspotted by the ugly demands of the yt world. Let's reflect on the words by Toni Morrison that: *"the function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being."* To this end, two questions will be answered in this essay. 1) why should the state not be the object of Black liberation? 2) why is invisibility from whiter society our pathway to freedom?

Vechtstaat and a Free-For-All Emancipation

Why should the state not be the object of Black liberation?

Proving a negative that the state should not be the object of Black liberation obviously does not in any way explicate where we should be finding freedom. Though I have many ideas regarding tactical solidarity, formed and effortlessly existing in communitarianism, DIY-spaces, perhaps even in anarchy, I can only attempt to make sense of these social relations in a theoretical and anecdotal sense. Having seen how decolonial and posthumanist thought can be translated into practices of solidarity, community-care, and above all, resistance is fascinating yet relatively nascent on the European continent. To this end, I can so far only discuss the headache the Black liberation movement in the Netherlands is giving me. In its plurality, it operates quite uniformly with limited centers of gravity competing behind the scenes for glamour, visibility in whiter society while others live in anguish and insecurity to make ends meet. Working on bending the arc of our freedom toward Black triumph should never sublimate a yearning for being loved in the face of grueling everyday insult and denial of prestige. It is simply petty, and one's unsettling sensation of rejection warrants therapy, community healing, and personal reflection instead of a stage for publicity. In an attempt not to sound too condemning and baseless, I want to highlight in the next paragraph that the Dutch Black liberation movement prioritizes state inclusion on the terms of PM Rutte's libertarian charade of right-wing marginalization. Thereafter, I will explain my reservations to continue pursuing this particularly senseless roleplay of being the good immigrant.

Gathering and interrogating newspaper outlets, literature, songs, speeches, exhibited creative works, projects, academic publications, it becomes apparent that Black liberation in the Netherlands over the past ten years is primarily concerned with redefining Dutchness and raising awareness about the existence of institutional racism. Further, it only marginally discusses ethical frameworks which should govern the social, inter-personal, and moral relationships between Black folks and yt folks.

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Firstly, Dutchness is conceived as a malleable concept that is somehow divorced from nationalism and can be co-opted by Black folks. Many works advocate for 'inclusive nationalism', transforming 'Dutch' to a colorful 'Dutchness,' or a historical reading of colonial migration which all ultimately aim to explain why the Netherlands as a nation-state is not wholly white. A colorful yet visually not so colorful example is the promo clip from Omroep Zwart (Black channel) -a first partially Black-led public broadcasting channel- which abuses the very notion of Blackness. In this clip, the narrative is presented that Blackness is not a distinct color but a synthesis of all other colors, simply a product of the intermixing of the full palette. Blackness is equated to a not so intimidating accessory to all its pre-existing colors. A hierarchy emerges within this aesthetic as whiteness at its center and Blackness promoted as an 'alternative' extension of whiteness to reify exclusively that Black folks are not white supremacist archetypes. Are the endgame yields that one is never asked again the question: where are you really from? - if so, we're failing. It is an exhausted frontier and equally begetting white supremacy even if being Dutch includes Black, brown, and yt people. Alternatively, if we seek to normalize awareness surrounding white privilege among non-Black folks, then we're blindly replicating American discourse steeped in polite-society regiment without any healthy chutzpah to go by. White privilege is deceiving as it does not implore anyone to hold themselves accountable to restore the position of the victimized or dismantle white supremacy within oneself and their surroundings. White privilege implies that whiteness is an ahistorical superpower that is real, while it is purely an imaginative one hinging for its existence on the willingness of people to play along with it and its capacity to marshal material penalties; ranging from withholding an honest grade to incarceration and lynching. A notion of a white duty of care is more appropriate, constituting a more precise form of allyship we need to not request, ask, but simply collectively always expect. If not, white privilege continues to protract white supremacy in a system where the moral imperative to be aware of one's own lofty individual white privileges supersedes taking actions to dismantle one's own sense of superiority rooted in whiteness.

Secondly, Black liberation is tied to institutional racism. However, constitutional categories such as citizenship and human rights are insufficiently powerful to overturn the foundation of the Netherlands as a nation-state par excellence. Belonging to the imagined community of the Dutch is more determinant of legal and institutional protection than strictly constitutional categories of citizenship and human rights. The child-care benefits scandal illustrated that citizenship does not offer protection from institutional racism from one's own state and that the ruling government is unwilling to hold itself accountable for institutional racism. Further, the structural lacunae created for older generations of Surinamese-Dutch citizens to access their pension funds or the two-tier passport system for Caribbean Dutch highlights that being a descendent of colonizers offers a better citizenship deal than being a citizen of formerly colonized peoples.

Even attempts to revamp citizenship have been ill-fated. Citizenship was revamped across Europe in the 20th century to accommodate the collapse of Empire and atone for a prewar global order where 'blut und boden' evidently came to fruition in the form of industrial pogroms and colonialism turned inward: fascism and the Holocaust. Whether it is the European Union project serving as a lifeboat for crumbling European imperial powers or human rights frameworks becoming salient in institutional workings of the state, an inclusive colorblind society did not transpire. The Anglosphere of settler colonialism and inverted neocolonial exploitation found in a 'Global Britain' offers charming prospects of multicolor citizenship. Despite its very charming outlook, we do not need to belabor statistics on anti-Black racism in either country. Even though 'a more perfect union' sets the US on a trajectory for redressing the enslavement of Black people, its pursuit is tardy and erases not to mention the genocide of Indigenous peoples for which redress unsettles the very foundation of the legitimacy on which the United States is built. In the aftermath of French federal imperialism and echoes of the Dreyfus Affair, in France, many desperately attempted to elevate the status of citizenship to an inclusive category reflecting French imperial grandeur with the myth of 'Black, blanc, beur' (Black, white, brown).

This myth is easily dispelled given that the very idea that Black and brown people are equally French citizens as yt ones is of course, evidently untrue. In northern Europe, 20th-century traditions of citizenship were designed to offset the enduring high concentration of capital wealth in the hands of industrialist aristocrats (in the case of Sweden, the aristocratic and industrialist class were the same class, rather unique) by inviting the landless classes into the category of whiteness. This culminated into the policy of 'folkhemmet' (the people's house) across the Nordic nations where Indigenous peoples up north were subjected to genocide, eugenics was institutionalized, and biological race theory was developed as an academic discipline by the Swedish State Institute for Race Biology in 1921, nowadays the University of Uppsala. To this day, social welfare policies in the Nordic countries are the first frontier where whiteness tests the relationship between citizens of color and the state. A grand history of social engineering has left the Nordic model of citizenship devoid of any contentious debate necessary to upset white supremacy.

The Dutch model I would describe as a 'vechtstaat' (competitive state model) where social emancipation is attained under the guise of a free-for-all siloed mentality ensuring state intervention is minimal. The Rutte doctrine in the Netherlands echoes 19th-century 'nachtwakersstaat' (corporatist military state model) state-society relations where neoliberal intervention facilitates the expansion of corporate interests by creating new markets and offering a secure investment environment by placing a great emphasis on police and surveillance. If we aspire to remodel citizenship under this system by virtue of human rights frameworks or a more robust social welfare system, we will fail. Under this system, access to resources and belonging to the imaginary Dutch community can only be awarded if we prove sufficiently tenacious, institutionally persuasive, and disruptive to the orderly functioning of the system. Such an endeavor necessitates piercingly sharp strategic and tactical organizing and coordination which would have to emulate the non-violent operations of the Black Panthers.

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If not, continuing efforts to tackle institutional racism pur sang and redefine Dutchness will leave us under this Rutte doctrine divided, classist, commodified tokens, and deeper entrenched in whiteness. Whoever can access and attain whiteness better through higher education, upper-class speech, lighter skin, and a Black hipster aesthetic can perhaps nestle in the category of Dutchness. This form of Dutchness is emerging more prominent, and we need to resist it, reject it, denounce it, and above all, eviscerate it.

The Dutch Black liberation movement ought to aspire to a stateless project. It ought to be a form of Black liberation which reconciles itself with the boundless imperial reach of Dutch and European white supremacist (neo)colonialism while recognizing one's very own relative exploitative position toward peoples of the global majority and the climate. White supremacy is not local, whiteness as logic for capitalism is not local, the climate crisis is not local, Empire was never local, Black lives are not local, and solidarity with Indigenous and other people of color and minorities is not local either. We need to recalibrate and reject Dutchness and decolonize human rights and recognize that 'humanity' is a violently humanist category which has erased our precolonial cultural bonds with nature and all living beings and introduced us to hierarchies of dignity and worth. Chiefly, we ought to ask ourselves the question: do we want to belong to a state that enables neocolonial exploitation and externalizes the risks of capitalism to the regions inhabited by the global majority for sustaining a material equilibrium for domestic political stability and riches at the expense of our daily safety, non-human lives, and the climate? Even though that said state attempts to fix its wrongs or seeks to identify mutual beneficial working relationships domestically and abroad, its remedies are often merely abating.

Finding Your Bearings Outside the Eye of the Storm

Why is invisibility from whiter society our pathway to freedom?

The gravitational pull of white supremacy seeks to entice absorption rather than dissolution. It is an ever-expansive project that is thrilled with finding virgin blood or soil to consume for political ammunition. To this end, we've a right to remove ourselves from the white and neoliberal gaze, which is conducive to mere representational politics in its echo chambers. Ultimately, becoming visible to audiences who will distort the truth, appropriate, and abuse is as violent as being fully erased. Claiming our space in obscurity delivers us the power to compose visibility within the Black community and articulate an imagining of us independent from reactionary zest or fixations on deconstructing whiteness. As seeing can become conflated with knowing, it becomes imperative that we can disjoint them consciously to ensure what is known is ours to keep and what becomes visible aids in constructing a Black liberation gaze. It is not to say our visibility needs to be completely severed from whiter society. There is a need to caution against passing judgment on those who do seek visibility, given that sanitized spaces can never fully exist. However, we need to develop tactical agility about what becomes visible and what narrative is being told. We're in service to our lives, not those who harm. As Édouard Glissant once wrote in his work *The Poetics of Relation*: we ought to demand the right to opacity. By embracing opacity, we force spectators to accept difference, subsequently upsetting the hierarchy of peoples and removing ourselves from racialized examination. Before we're understood as also valuable minority humans from the global majority, we ought to be able to exist unharmed as free beings.

Refusing to control the narrative surrounding us yields time but also a strategic advantage. Existing in the eyes of the beholder permits us to exploit the racialized and subjugating role that is being imposed on and projected onto us. A strategy of extraversion it is called. By capitalizing on the material dependency that exists between the Black community and stolen colonial wealth, it is merely an act of wealth redistribution to pretend that we're in 'need.'

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Existing on the surface as desperate well-integrated yet unknowing blank slates awaiting to be civilized, we can exploit the yt saviorism existing in the Netherlands while exploring Black repatriation through initiatives such as 'Beyond the Year of Return'. If we succeed at doing this while organizing covertly, we can create a Black imagination unspotted from the world where our self-centered efforts are afforded by recapitalized robbed wealth.

Conclusion

We're members of this earth walking the tightrope of a web of colonial mishaps before we're citizens of this kingdom. The modern western state either punishes or conditionally supports you. This eurocentric masculine and feminine arm of statehood does not produce a form of citizenship in which we can exist. In the absence of redress, restorative justice and remembrance as the third arm of statehood, let's turn our backs to the state and be Black together. It does not mean we ought to be silent, as Audre Lorde so poignantly addressed in the work *Your Silence Won't Protect You*. Nothing is mutually exclusive, yet priorities need to be set. Invisibility constitutes the Black space where we learn to know ourselves and not survive but exploit and thrive in the ugly white supremacist patriarchal capitalist world we live in as no-nonsense Black beings.

*See I want what I want and I want when I want it
I paved the way for you to make a move so get up on it
Keep holding yourself back you can't make up your mind*

*Make up your mind
You gotta make up your mind
Make up your mind (yeah)*

- *I Want* by ENNY

Akú Anah