

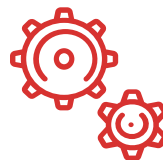
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APRIL
2021

3:00PM-7:30pm



Online Webex Event

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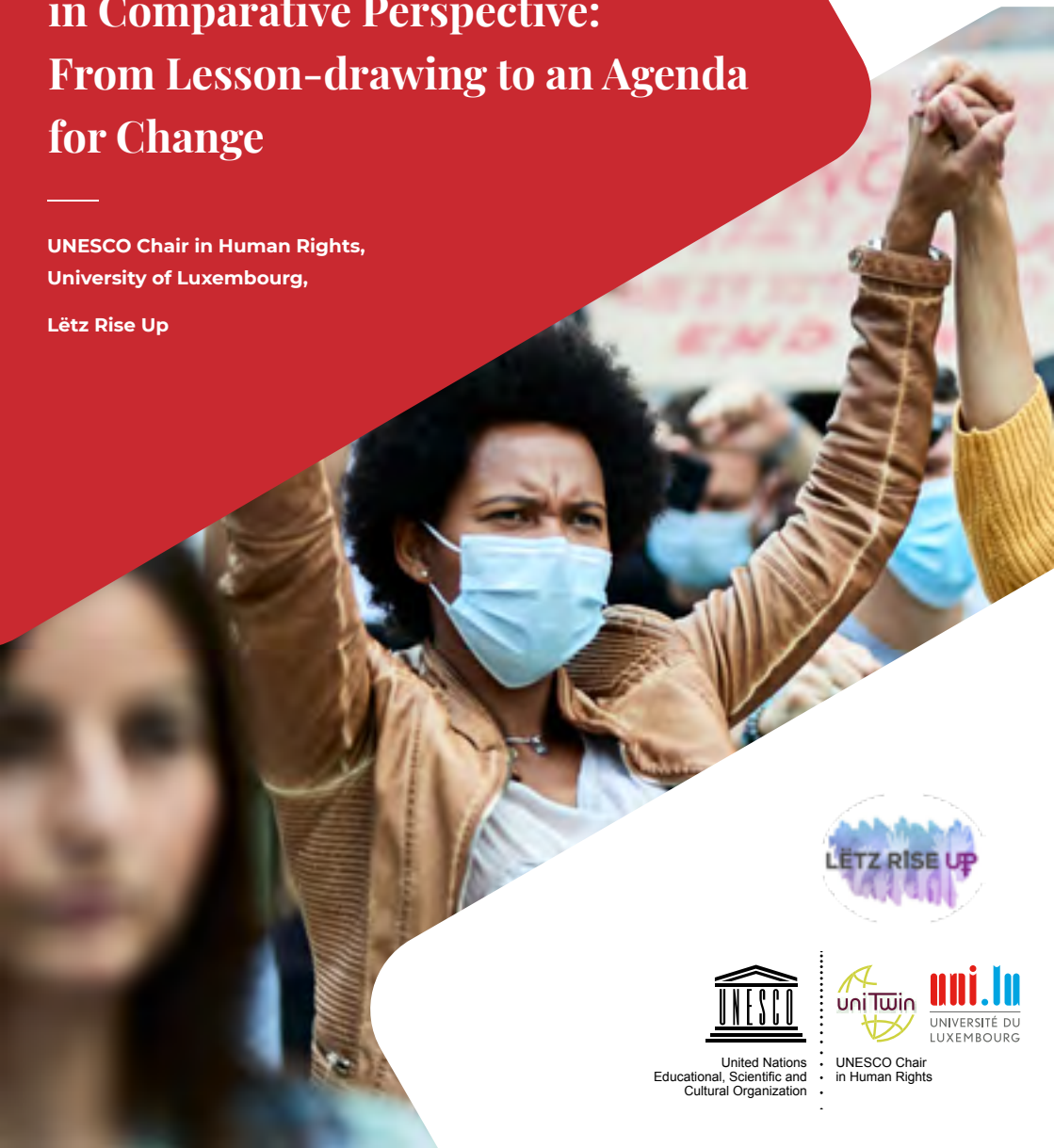


DIGITAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Understanding Institutional Racism in Comparative Perspective: From Lesson-drawing to an Agenda for Change

UNESCO Chair in Human Rights,
University of Luxembourg,

LëtZ Rise Up



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Chair
in Human Rights



Concept

The brutal killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis in May 2020 triggered a wave of global protests under the emblematic banner of 'Black Lives Matter', drawing renewed attention to longstanding issues of racial injustice and inequality both in the United States and internationally. While the US debate inevitably reflects the country's own particular historical experience of slavery and segregation, the events have also demanded renewed critical reflection on Europe's colonial past and contemporary realities.

In terms of public policy, the attendant debates and discussions have often focused around the concept of 'institutional racism'. The term, first seminally used in the American context by Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton in their 1967 book *Black Power*, has in the ensuing decades acquired a much wider international resonance. On this side of the Atlantic, the 1999 UK inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, for example, found the existence of a culture of 'institutional racism' within the Metropolitan (London) Police, defining the concept in terms that have acquired a broader significance:

'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes,

attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.'

Here in Luxembourg, questions of racial discrimination were prominently brought on to the national agenda by a 2018 report of the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency surveying the experiences of people of African descent in 12 EU member states and published under the title 'Black in the EU'. The survey reported comparatively high levels of perceived discrimination in the case of Luxembourg across a range of categories, including instances of racially motivated harassment and conditions shaping access to employment, educational and other opportunities. Following on from the report, the November 2019 conference 'Being Black in Luxembourg' provided for an important public airing of issues that have to date received comparatively little national attention.

It is against this background that the present half-day online conference is organised with a view to furthering our national reflection on issues of racial discrimination. Organised by the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights at the University of Luxembourg and the NGO LëtzeRiseUP, the conference brings together a number of leading

international experts on questions of institutional racism to present their understanding of the problems and the challenges going forward. The presentations will allow both for a deepened understanding of different national experiences and of the transversal lessons that may be drawn across those cases and potentially applied in the context of our own distinctively multicultural society. Our final session will present the conclusions of the 'Racismes – Comprendre pour Agir' training workshops held in November-December 2020 as the first stage of this project. Through our discussions and exchanges, we hope to provide new insight into the issues, frames, and policy instruments necessary to move forward this important national dialogue.

Programme

15:00 - 15:15

Introduction

Professor Robert Harmsen, UNESCO Chair in Human Rights, University of Luxembourg

15:15 - 16:15

‘At Least We Don’t Do That Here’ How Europe Mis(Understands) Black America

Professor Gary Younge, Professor of Sociology, University of Manchester

16:15 - 17:15

Black Lives Matter, Social Justice, and the Limits of Multiculturalism

Professor Debra Thompson, Associate Professor of Political Science and Canada Research Chair in Racial Inequality in Democratic Societies, McGill University

17:15 - 17:30 - Break

17:30 - 18:30

BLM: A Transnational Movement that Changed the Dutch Landscape

Professor Halleh Ghorashi, Professor of Sociology, VU Amsterdam

18:30 - 19:30

Combating Racism in the Land of MultiKulti

Sandrine Gashonga, Antiracist and Intercultural Trainer and Consultant

Speakers

Robert Harmsen

University of Luxembourg

Robert Harmsen is Professor of Political Science and Head of the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Luxembourg, where he has also held the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights since 2019. Professor Harmsen has published extensively on aspects of the European human rights regime, the processes of European integration, the rise of Euroscepticism, and comparative and international higher education policy. His current research focuses on the dynamics of judicial globalisation in relation to the diffusion of fundamental rights, as well as on the role of human rights in the policy process.



Gary Younge

University of Manchester



Gary Younge is an award-winning author, broadcaster and a professor of sociology at the University of Manchester in England. Formerly a US-based columnist and editor-at-large at The Guardian, he is an editorial board member of the Nation magazine, the Alfred Knobler Fellow for Type Media and an Honorary Fellow of the British Academy. He has written five books: the most recent, *Another Day in the Death of America*, *A Chronicle of Ten Short Lives*, won the J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize from Columbia Journalism School and Nieman Foundation. He has also written for The New York Review of Books, Granta, GQ, The Financial Times and The New Statesman and made several radio and television documentaries on subjects ranging from gay marriage in Kentucky to east Europeans and Brexit. He studied French and Russian at Heriot Watt University in Edinburgh and Newspaper Journalism at City University in London. After 12 years reporting from America for the Guardian, he moved back to London in 2015.

Abstract

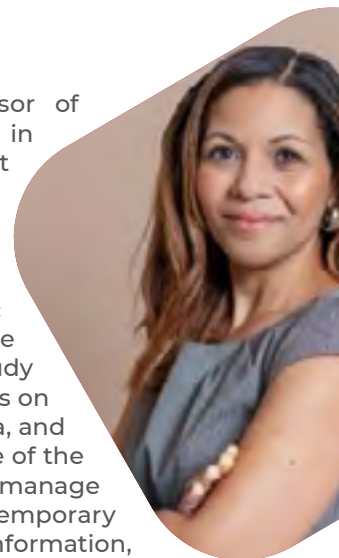
European views on Black America are informed by a range of contradictory tendencies: amnesia about its own colonial past, ambivalence about its racial present, a tradition of anti-racism and international solidarity and an often fraught geo-political relationship with the United States itself. From the vantage point of a continent that both resents and covets American power, and is in little position to do anything about it, African Americans represent to many in Europe a redemptive force— living proof that that US is both not all that it claims to be and could be so much greater than it is.

This sense of superiority is made possible, in no small part, by a woefully, wilfully incomplete and toxically nostalgic view of Europe's own colonial history which has left significant room for denial, distortion, ignorance and sophistry.

The result, in the post-war era, has been moments of solidarity often impaired by exocitisation or infantilisation in which Europe has found it easier to export anti-racism across the Atlantic than to practice it at home or export it across the Mediterranean and beyond.

Debra Thompson

McGill University



Dr. Debra Thompson is an Associate Professor of Political Science and Canada Research Chair in Racial Inequality in Democratic Societies at McGill University. She is a leading scholar of the comparative politics of race, with teaching and research interests that focus on the dynamics of racial inequality in democratic societies. Dr. Thompson's award-winning book, *The Schematic State: Race, Transnationalism, and the Politics of the Census* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) is a study of the political development of racial classifications on the national censuses of the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. The book maps the changing nature of the census from an instrument historically used to manage and control racialized populations to its contemporary purpose as an important source of statistical information, employed for egalitarian ends. Her research has also appeared in journals such as the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Social and Legal Studies*, and *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, among others. Dr. Thompson previously taught at the University of Oregon and Northwestern University, and held a SSHRC postdoctoral fellowship with the Center for American Political Studies at Harvard University in 2010-2011.

Abstract

As a model of social inclusion developed in the late twentieth century, multiculturalism is a form of diversity management that provides different forms and levels of public recognition to cultural communities. The first two decades of the twenty-first century have revealed, however, that the politics of recognition are wholly insufficient to challenge persistent racial economic inequality, rampant political suppression, and the frequent, violent encounters with the state experienced by Black citizens in the United States and beyond. This lecture contends that Black Lives Matter, one of the most important social movements of the twenty-first century, has exposed the conceptual limits of the multicultural model. It explores how the demands of the Movement for Black Lives go beyond liberal multiculturalism and instead propose a more radical approach that emphasizes the political, economic, and moral imperatives of social justice and democratic repair.

Halleh Ghorashi

VU Amsterdam

Halleh Ghorashi is Full Professor of Diversity and Integration in the Department of Sociology at the VU (Vrije Universiteit) Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She has done research on the struggles of refugees in their path of inclusion for the past 25 years. She is the author and co-author of several books and has published many articles on topics such as identity, diasporic positioning and cultural diversity both inside and outside organizations. Her most recent international book publications are the edited volumes: *Contested Belonging: Spaces, Practices, Biographies* (together with K. Davis & P. Smets, eds., Emerald 2018) and *Scholarly Engagement and Decolonisation: Views from South Africa, The Netherlands and the United States* (together with M. Crul, L. Dick & A. Valenzuela, eds. Sun Media 2020). In 2017, she received this prestigious VICI grant on Engaged Scholarship and Narratives of Change from NWO. In 2018, she was appointed as a Crown Member of the SER (Dutch Social Economic Council) and in 2020 as a member of KNAW (The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences).



Abstract

In this lecture I will discuss how Black Lives Matter, as a transnational movement, has changed the Dutch landscape regarding the existence of institutional racism and cross-racial solidarities. In the last 25 years, I have been engaging with the life experiences of refugee and migrant women (through various forms of narratives methodology). In these studies these women narrate a strong presence of exclusionary mechanisms (both blatant and subtle) within the Dutch context. Yet, until recently, the existing implicit and growing explicit forms of racism in the Dutch public space had not led to a public recognition of the existence of structural forms of racism in the Netherlands. In an earlier work, I showed the historical and societal reasons behind the denial of racism in the Dutch context despite the fact that racist acts and statements in the public space had gained a strong presence. I argued that this was partly based on the historically rooted idea of the superiority of Dutch culture in the Dutch migration discourse (which Wekker conceptualized as cultural archive) and its link to the categorical framing of migrants as 'a problem' in Dutch society. This history together with a positive self-image of the Dutch as progressive had made it almost impossible for people to accept the notion that racism was part of the Dutch self-image. But something shifted with the arrival of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the Netherlands. I argue that Dutch society can take advantage of this momentum to transform its non-reflective progressive image into critical self-reflection and actions aimed at the inclusion of diverse groups by addressing institutional racism beyond 'good intentions'.

Sandrine Gashonga

LëtZ Rise Up

Sandrine Gashonga is an organizer, trainer and consultant with LëtZ Rise Up. Her work extends to teaching intercultural competence awareness in the Bachelor en Sciences Sociales at the University of Luxembourg, facilitation at the Citizens' debate on Space for Europe (Luxembourg) and training mediators in conflict resolution and cross-cultural communication. She holds a MA in Modern and Contemporary European Philosophy. Her fields of expertise include intercultural communication, conflict resolution and racial equity education.



Abstract

In Luxembourg too, the worldwide Black Lives Matter movement has had an impact. A demonstration that gathered more than 2000 people was held on June 5, 2020, and a debate on racism took place in the Luxembourg Parliament, resulting in the adoption of two motions and a resolution related to the fight against racism, which was never seen before. However, it was not in 2020 that the existence of racism was discovered in a country with a 'Multikulti' spirit, multicultural and proud of its diversity. In November 2019, the NGO ASTI organized a conference entitled 'Being Black in Luxembourg' which attempted to expose and analyze the very worrying results of the study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 'Being Black in Europe', with great media coverage, but with no follow-up at the political level. Based on this observation, LëtZ Rise Up decided to organize an anti-racism training for teachers, social workers and associative staff, which was held on November 30th and December 1st and 2nd, 2020. This training proposed to give keys of understanding and markers to understand racism as a system of domination, by asking why it is essential to understand history in order to understand racism, how it manifests itself, in Luxembourg as well as elsewhere, and is maintained despite the fight against racism, or how racism impacts the world in terms of discrimination for some people, and in terms of privileges for others.



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