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**Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities (CSJH)** is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal established in 2011 at Palacký University Olomouc, one of the oldest Central European universities. The journal is dedicated to various important fields of the humanities: history, linguistics, theatre & film (including TV and radio), music, and cultural anthropology, with interdisciplinary themes among these fields.

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#### **Contact:**

Wilken Engelbrecht  
Filozofická fakulta UP  
Křížkovského 10  
771 80 Olomouc  
Czech Republic  
wilken.engelbrecht@upol.cz  
<https://csjh.upol.cz>

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Responsible editor: Otakar Loutocký  
Technical editor: Jitka Bednaříková  
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Matylda Andała

Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic

ORCID: 0000-0002-2077-3428

# Values and Norms as Indicators for Dutch Anti-immigrant Politics

**Abstract** | The relationship between the presence of Muslim minorities in Dutch society and their influence patterns for anti-immigrant politics are the main focus of this article. Their existence has not been without consequences for the socio-cultural landscape of the country and for the sense of 'Dutch identity'. I am making an attempt to trace shifts in the public debate on multiculturalism, and therefore attitudes that are crucial for setting up a paradigm for anti-immigrant rhetoric and politics among populist far right political parties in the Netherlands.

**Keywords** | Muslim minorities, Dutch society, relationship, anti-immigrant politics, integration issues

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## 1 Introduction

In recent years, national and cultural identity have become central themes of public debates and politics in the Netherlands, especially in the context of migrant identities, particularly with a Muslim background, which seem to be problematic. The problem emerges in the light of Islam and the failed integration of migrants based on inconsistency in their cultural and religious values. Sexual and reproductive health and rights constitute a significant part of politics in the Netherlands. In a secular nation-state, such as the Netherlands, sexual rights have acquired a symbolic value. Therefore (free) sexuality has become an important issue in debates about integration and multiculturalism. In other words, the rights of LGBT+ community and women have been found to be, among other things, important components of Dutch national self-awareness. A number of Dutch politicians combine anti-migration and nationalist conservatism with a progressive attitude towards women's and LGBT+ emancipation and their rights. Political parties, when making statements, project the image of tolerance and emancipation for women and the LGBT+ community as an achievement that may be imperiled by Islam. Secular and emancipation rhetoric is used as an instrument of anti-immigration, racist and exclusive politics. The ideas of progress, secularization, emancipation and individualism define categories of communities that are progressive and therefore contradictory to the Muslim community. The rhetorics of feminism and LGBT+ are applied as grounds for criticism of Muslim practices and discourse. It can be argued that the Dutch, their national identity and social cohesion are threatened by immigrants with different cultural and religious backgrounds. This makes sexual liberalism, as a counterpart to religious conservatism, a powerful symbol of Dutch identity (Spierings 2021: 171).

## 2 Shifts in Dutch tolerance

The Netherlands is a small country in Western Europe, but also one of the largest commercial centers in the world, which originated mainly in the 17th century. Trade contacts went hand in hand with cultural exchange and diversity, which increased especially in the second half of the twentieth century when many people from the former colonies, or asylum seekers and labor migrants came to the Netherlands. Over the course of the decades after the Second World War, several waves of migration to the Netherlands took place. In the 1960s and 1970s, in order to ensure the development of the economy, the Netherlands received a large number of labor immigrants, particularly from Morocco and Turkey. Most of the immigrants originally planned to return home after their work duties, but many of them decided to stay in the Netherlands (Kennedy 2017: 420–421). Based on its multicultural endeavors and pillarisation tradition (*verzuiling* – organization of society into different ideological subcultures, which officially ended after the social changes in the 1960s) in the 1980s and 1990s the Netherlands reassured the new ethnic and religious minorities with the possibilities of embracing their culture and religion in order to emancipate and adjust to their new homeland. The ensuing clash of cultures, Eastern and Western, beliefs, Christianity and Islam, has led to many discussions about the new cultural challenges and the ‘Dutch identity’, and raised questions about the shape of multicultural society and its core values (Kennedy 2017: 436). These developments have had a major impact on shifts in ideas about the identities of the ‘Dutch’ and the ‘other’. Scientists, journalists, politicians and policymakers have been questioning and attempting to redefine these identities in a new reality and multicultural setting.

It is important to underline that although the Netherlands is one of the most liberal countries in the world with its longstanding tradition for tolerance towards minorities, dating back to the Middle Ages, tolerance for homosexuality is a rather new phenomenon, and coincides with modernity, dating back in fact only to the 1980s. After a series of developments in the 1960s and 1970s, general moral sentiments in the Netherlands have changed. Students rebelled against existing reality patterns which resulted in a broader counterculture and sexual revolution, and progressive secularisation has led to social change and removal of prejudices towards homosexuality, deeply anchored in Catholic and Protestant belief (Oczko 2013: 45). Real and tangible change was introduced along with the Parliament’s passage of a bill on prohibition of discrimination in 1993, among others on the grounds of sex or homosexual orientation. As repercussions of previous developments, in 1998 civil partnerships were legalized and the Netherlands became the first country in the world to introduce the possibility of marriage of same-sex couples in 2001 (Oczko 2013: 46–47).

It can be observed that once the homosexual minority gained its emancipation in the Netherlands, a new antagonist, the *Other* in Dutch society was found, the Muslim. The complexity of connections between society, embodied identities and related attributes found their reflections in domestic politics. When taking into account the phenomenon of the unstable nature of identity and the continuous process of its discovery and determination (Smith 2002), it can be argued that it ties in with the need to develop politics that do not generate exclusive effects, but which take into account values which belong to all groups/diasporas in a given society (Bobako 2010). There were therefore in the Netherlands, which heretofore was organized in pillars, some attempts to create a nearly “Islamic pillar” in the 1970s and 1980s, and provide room to embrace Muslim culture and religion. This idea proved, however, less than viable, which resulted in social segregation and more discussions about cultural conflict.

### 3 Muslim identity in Western Europe

In the 1970s, Edward W. Said published *Orientalism*, where he argued that a sense of belonging to a community or identification with a given community leads to differentiation between diverse communities and nations, which results in determining the phenomenon of alienation. Members of other nations/communities are considered strangers. Recognition of the ‘familiar’ and ‘strange’ forms the basis for nationalist tendencies, by means of the ‘foreign’ acting as a prejudice and carrying negative connotations (Said 1978). He also declared that the Orient was a product of European ideology by means of which it was possible to discuss Europe in correlation to Arabs (the Other) and Islam and their stereotypical perception (Said 1978: 69–70). He pointed out that inventing collective identities and unifying rubrics like “the West” or “Islam” are practices that are prejudicial and should be counteracted, by reason of their reductive character and the complexity and uniqueness of individuals, that in in this regard become discarded (Said 1978: 35).

Current debate in Western Europe on multicultural societies involves the phenomenon of *inventing a Muslim identity*.<sup>1</sup> According to Monika Bobako, a labor migrant in Europe,<sup>2</sup> who previously was mostly affiliated with his class background, along with his nationality or ethnicity, has become eventually affiliated with his religious and cultural background, and therefore turned into a Muslim migrant. In other words, the original understanding of Muslim immigrants as workers has been dismissed by the discourse emphasizing their cultural difference as a Muslim. This approach dates back to the late 1980s. One can argue that this concept is very simplified, however, and does not take into account the complexity of Muslims as a community and considers them as a homogeneous group with shared cultural affiliation. Among other things, it tends to forget that European Muslims come from various countries. In consideration of the doctrinal solidarity of Muslims, they are divided by a number of fundamental differences, such as cultural, ethnic, linguistic, political, economic or class, which exclude the possibility to concern them under the umbrella term “Muslims” (Bobako 2017: 107–111).

This reduction also applies to the relationship between Islam and homosexuality, and the acculturation processes of Muslim minorities in a host-country (Röder and Spierings 2022: 536–537), which is a central point of this article. Gender role attitudes have become dominant in the discussion about Europe and Muslim immigrants, where Western Europe is presented as culturally progressive and Islam oppressive towards women and the LGBT+ minority.

### 4 Debate on Dutch identity in a multicultural environment

(Dutch) identity is not static, but the result of a process of identification, negotiation and discovery. This process takes place at multiple levels such as international trade, migration movements, cultural exchanges, international networks, alliances and collaborations. Due to intensified migration over recent decades, the debate on integration has been dominated by cultural differences for several reasons since the turn of millennium. The domestic politics of many countries are

<sup>1</sup> Ferruh Yilmaz published an extensive work, which describes the shift of the prism in the perception of Arab labor migrants in Western Europe. The book *How the Workers Became Muslims: Immigration, Culture and Hegemonic Transformation in Europe* (2016) is based on his personal experience. Yilmaz, born of Jordanian-Palestinian immigrant parents and raised in Denmark, only discovered himself to be a Muslim, once other people started to view him as a Muslim. Prior to that, he had no affiliation with Islam, or with Christianity. In his book, he argues that the Danish case study is relevant to Europe in a broader sense.

<sup>2</sup> According to Tjitske Akkerman (2015), the last decade has been dominated by family-related migration and therefore the focus in the European debate has shifted to family concerns, and the status of women and due to this fact, the anti-immigration populist radical-right rhetoric has included gender issues.

focused on solving problems generated by cultural differences between immigrants and their host-country.

It can be argued that with this concentration on cultural differences and incompatibilities, current politics in Western Europe and in the Netherlands has become strongly associated with multiculturalism, which can be seen from two perspectives. Taken from one point of view, it refers to multiple cultural groups coexisting within one country, and from another point of view it is a concept of a policy for better integration of a society made of different cultural groups. The measures from these two perspectives are central to contemporary public and political debate. Multiculturalism stems from migration, which does not only indicate movement. Viewed from a political perspective, it is a complex process that touches on many more dimensions, such as the economy, sovereignty, human rights, and national identity and therefore migration is not without an influence on politics (Martin 2014: vii).

Since the nation-state (as the Netherlands is concerned) participates in multifaceted processes of globalization, including intensified migrations, it can be argued that its important functions such as competence, form, autonomy, authority and legitimacy have changed (Barker 2000: 202). Its domestic politics have to focus on processes and developments that take place within the state, and fulfill certain needs, followed by making certain decisions. Multicultural politics can consequently be understood as a politics of diversity. This can be applied to the development of a political community that would provide room for cultural diversity in order to prevent possible injustice within a society (Bobako 2010: 122). In other words, internal cultural diversity requires countries to adjust their politics respectively. Hence multicultural politics face many challenges to prevent undesirable side effects, despite their good intentions.

An example of good intentions within multicultural politics, could be seen in the Netherlands and the aforementioned attempt to create “an Islamic pillar” based on the model of so-called *verzuiling*. This attempt has been widely criticized. A starting point for the current national Dutch debate on multiculturalism and integration concerns has been recognized in an essay by the Dutch publicist and Social Democrat, Paul Scheffer, *Het multiculturele drama* published in 2000. Scheffer presented his critical observations on domestic policies concerning integration with Muslim immigrants and their consequent generations living in the Netherlands. He argued in his essay that the policy would lead to increased inequality and contribute to a sense of alienation in society and would eventually lead to a multicultural drama and therefore to a serious threat to social peace. According to Scheffer, tolerance has to be defended against compulsion of conscience and there should be no place in public life for movements that want to abolish the separation of state and church or the equal rights of men and women (Scheffer 2000). Additional incidents at the beginning of the twenty first century, such as the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, nourished the consciousness of Islam and Muslims in the West, i. e. in Dutch society and raised many questions about the compatibility of Islamic and the liberal values of the Netherlands.

By that time Dutch politics had observed the growth of a populist movement led by Pim Fortuyn, a former Marxist academic and open homosexual, who over a very short period of time achieved wide-spread popularity in Dutch society. This was due to his populist approach and willingness to express what many people had had on their minds about Islam and its underdeveloped (in his opinion) character (Versteeg 2012: 61). He was not able to enjoy his fame all that long. In 2002, nine days before the General Elections, he was killed by an animal rights activist, who found him a real threat to the country. This incident induced a significant growth of support for his political party, which gained 26 out of 150 seats in the Dutch parliament, while the pre-election opinion polls had been predicting 0. Although his party did not last long, his followers remained active and loyal to his standpoints (Kennedy 2017: 440). In 2004, another murder

happened during a time of political turmoil. Theo van Gogh, a renowned film-maker was killed by a Muslim radical, after the creation of a film together with Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Dutch-American feminist of Somalian origin, presenting Islam as a threat to women's rights (Kennedy 2017: 441).

These aforementioned strong examples of developments in Dutch politics have their continuity in a lively debate on national and cultural identity in the Netherlands since the beginning of this century. Current Dutch populist radical right politics combine anti-migration and nationalist conservatism with a progressive attitude towards women's and LGBT+ emancipation and their rights. It can be observed that the rhetoric of these parties involves a shift from the focus on protecting traditional values to protecting modern Western values. It can be argued that in order to fulfill their anti-migration and anti-Islamic political agenda, they adopt a more progressive profile by placing an emphasis on the principles of gender equality and LGBT+ rights.

Generally, populist radical right parties can be characterized by their traditional approach towards gender roles and family values, along with dissent against same-sex marriage or abortion. According to Tjitske Akkerman (2015: 38–39), some of these parties adopt a more flexible and modern profile. Such an example in Dutch politics is the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV, Party for Freedom), led by Geert Wilders, holding 17 seats in the Dutch parliament. The party is known for its protection for women's and LGBT+ rights. The introduction of the current political program of the party (2021–2025), which was developed prior to the last parliamentary elections in 2021, perceives Islam and Muslim immigrants as a threat to native Dutch values, including LGBT+ and women's rights. I present some points from the program of PVV below to illustrate its rhetoric.

(...) And be able to conduct its own immigration policy again and close our borders to fortune seekers and immigrants from Islamic countries. Because the Netherlands is overpopulated and Islam does not belong in the Netherlands.

(...) And that there is nothing more unwise than to give free rein to an Islamic ideology that wants to take our freedom away.

(...) Where our money is used for our own people. A country without headscarves but with traditional Dutch coziness and respect for the elderly. A country where foreigners are no longer favored and our own people are no longer discriminated.

(...) Jews, Christians, gays, apostates and women are often the first victims of Islamization. This is unfortunately also the case in the Netherlands.

(...) Because here as well, 70% of Muslims view Islamic rules as more important than the democratically established Dutch laws.

(...) Together with Islam, lack of freedom, discrimination and violence have been brought to (the Netherlands).

(...) It is high time to defend our freedom. To safeguard our culture, our way of life and our core values. Reversing the Islamization of our country is therefore the most important thing that must now be done in the Netherlands. It is a question of our existence: the survival of a free Netherlands depends on the extent to which we manage to push back Islam.

Only the PVV has developed a vision to de-Islamize the Netherlands, by prohibiting, for example, the spread of Islamic ideology, and by closing the borders to all asylum seekers and migrants from Islamic countries.

Enough is enough.

(...) Think of all those Dutch Muslims who view Islamic rules as more important than Dutch laws. If you want to live according to the rules of Islam and Sharia, go to an Islamic country! The Netherlands is ours!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Partij voor de Vrijheid, *Het gaat om u, Verkiezingsprogramma 2021–2025*, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://www.pvv.nl/images/09012020/verkiezingen2020/0acxyuew34z/VerkiezingsProgramma2021-Final.pdf>.



More detailed standpoints concerning identity, migration, Islam and integration are presented in the entire program and foremost in the sections *Uw cultuur en tradities* (Your culture and traditions) and *Uw veiligheid* (Your safety).

Another populist radical right party is the *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD, Forum for Democracy), led by Thierry Baudet and holding 5 seats in the current Dutch parliament. The program of this party is criticism of Islam and immigration, however, the standpoints about LGBT+ and women's rights are more nuanced, and not explicitly defended. There is an extensive part on immigration and identity among the standpoints, where the party suggests introducing a *Wet Bescherming Nederlandse Waarden* (Act on Protection of Dutch Values), which among other points, states:

(...) Due to the arrival of large groups of (mainly Muslim) immigrants, a number of achievements and core values of our society have come under great pressure.

All people are fundamentally equal, regardless of gender, race or sexual orientation.

The wearing of niqabs, balaclavas and other face coverings in public, other than for health reasons, is prohibited.<sup>4</sup>

The above presented examples, are just a small sample of the dynamic debate about identity, immigration, integration, values and norms. It should also be mentioned that there are other parties in the Netherlands, including the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) a central-liberal party and the most represented one in the Dutch parliament. It has been ruling since 2010, has a major impact on the emancipation of LGBT+ rights, but is currently sending out anti-immigration signals. These aforementioned trends suggest that current multicultural politics can be characterized by a shift from a focus on (equal) rights to a focus on values and norms, which leads to solving problems based on cultural differences. The rights of the LGBT+ minority are viewed as native Dutch values, although right-wing conservatism is generally unfavorable towards LGBTQ+ (Dickey, Spierings and Van Klingeren 2022: 518).

It is important to look at the attitudes among voters, and the general mood in society, as the question arises as to what extent the rhetoric of far right populist parties reflects the point of view of society. Research on voting attitudes towards so-called sexually modern nativists in Western Europe was conducted in 2017. It argues that right-wing Dutch populist parties did not attract votes from LGBT+ minority or of those who supported LGBT+ rights but were anti-migrant, despite their prominent homo-nationalist rhetoric. These voters favored the mainstream VVD, which presented more moderate standpoints on migration issues (Spierings, Lubbers and Zaslove 2017: 216–237). The Netherlands Institute for Social Research has conducted, in contrast, an extensive report on Dutch identity and its shifts over the years, which among other things originate from attitudes towards Muslims. According to the latest research from 2019, *Thinking of the Netherlands*, the (native) Dutch population is of the view that Western European and Muslims' way of life are incompatible and therefore cannot be seen as a typically Dutch phenomenon; furthermore, Islam is mainly seen in the Netherlands as a threat. This negative picture of Muslims refers to (perceived) cultural differences, over-representation in crime, fear of religious orthodoxy and violence and the threat of losing a particular cultural identity or lifestyle. This is often portrayed with the example of values such as equality between men and women, the acceptance of homosexuality and the separation of church and state (De Hart 2019: 34).

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<sup>4</sup> Forum voor Democratie, Standpunten, accessed November 5, 2022, <https://fvd.nl/standpunten/wet-bescherming-nederlandse-waarden>.



## Conclusion

The current debate on multicultural issues in the Netherlands is focused on norms and values that should be viewed as dominant in Dutch society, which has over recent decades been faced with the receiving and acculturating of migrants with a Islamic background. Due to the fact that Dutch (Christianity-rooted) culture can seem to be in contradiction with Islamic culture, multicultural and integration politics are dominated by gender issues. Populist far-right political parties use rhetoric based on national sentiments derived from empowerment of women and the LGBT+ community in order to contrast the progressive values of Western Europe with backward Muslim culture, despite the fact that their general standpoints are rather hostile towards these groups as well. This overview can serve as a starting point for further research on general social moods in regard to national and cultural identities, multicultural policies and voters' attitudes. It can be even more interesting in light of the upcoming development of the recently adopted *Feministisch Buitenland Beleid* (Feminist Foreign Policy) by the Dutch government, especially in the perspective of common goals with the European Union and the fact that the (far-)right political parties in Central and Eastern Europe do not share the same approach to gender issues.

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# Martin Látal

Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic  
ORCID: 0000-0002-8007-9825

# Veronika Veselková

Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic  
ORCID: 0000-0003-3575-3654

## League of Legends: Multimodal Analysis of Team Representation at the 2020 World Championship

**Abstract** | This article concerns the questions of media representation of players and teams in the final match of *League of Legends* championship. The goal is to uncover the underlying mechanisms of virtual representation of the teams in interplay with their physical presence in the hall and their image in the professional commentary using multimodal analysis. The virtual level of this representation is primarily governed by general trends in esports. Physical image of both teams in the championship hall should be interpreted with regard to their cultural background as both teams are from eastern Asia, where for example certain color symbolics differ from the western culture complex. The professional commentary shows us examples of imbalance and favoritism, giving more space for representation to the blue team and generally regarding it in a more positive light.

**Keywords** | esports, League of legends, multimodal analysis, representation, videogame

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### 1 Introduction

*League of Legends*<sup>1</sup> is one of the most popular competitive online videogames, an esports if you will, in recent history. It is a representative of the MOBA<sup>2</sup> genre along with titles such as *DOTA2*,<sup>3</sup> *Smite*,<sup>4</sup> or *Heroes of the Storm*.<sup>5</sup> The basic principles of the genre can be summarized as follows: two teams of usually five players each clash in a virtual environment, where they are represented by characters with unique sets of skills and abilities. In case of *League of Legends* these characters are referred to as *champions*. Besides these champions, non-player characters

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<sup>1</sup> *League of Legends*. Riot Games, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Multiplayer online battle arena.

<sup>3</sup> *DOTA2*. Valve Corporation, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> *Smite*. Hi Rez Studios – Titan Forge Games, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Heroes of the Storm*. Blizzard Entertainment, 2015.

and buildings appear in the game, serving as obstacles on the road to victory. The goal of each match is to destroy the core of the enemy base called the *nexus*. The winner is determined solely by destruction of this structure and no other statistics or completed goals matter. During the match players can purchase items for their champion with the in-game currency, thus raising their defenses, attack, health points and magical powers. Furthermore, the champions gain experience for completing various tasks during the match and advance to higher levels,<sup>6</sup> which allows them to improve their abilities.

*League of Legends* (abbreviated as *LoL*) has gained major following during its existence. Based on the global statistics, the number of active players has reached 115 million<sup>7</sup> and it ranks among the most popular esports alongside *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*<sup>8</sup> and already mentioned title *DOTA2*. This status as a global phenomenon has naturally garnered the attention of the scientific community. Ratan et al. (2015) have researched the gender imbalance in the *LoL* player population and its possible causes, Mora-Cantallops and Sicilia (2018) focus on the self-evaluation of player capabilities and overall perception of the competitive environment, and Taylor with Hammond (2018) turn their research to minority groups in the gaming community.

We have decided to turn our attention to the representation of individual players and specific teams on the professional esports level. The main reason to focus on the highest level of play is its impact on the overall image of the gaming community even outside *League of Legends* itself, and interplay of the virtual world with the representation of real-world individuals and greater units such as states or culture complexes. The main goal of this study is to describe the mechanisms of the virtual representation of the players and their teams on the professional level and relate it to their physical presence at the championship. The main output of this research is a list of specific principles and factors influencing both physical and virtual representation. Furthermore, we debate the adequacy of its certain facets, such as the professional commentary and we would like to open a debate about the clash of individual and team representation in esports.

The topic of this paper is the analysis of representation of the professional esports teams Damwon Gaming (DWG) and Suning (SN) in the recording of the 2020 *League of Legends* world championship. We have focused approximately on 25 minutes of the recording, from 25<sup>th</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup> minute of the 61-minute playtime. The sample size was narrowed down due to repetition of the virtual representation aspects in the first half of the recording and the importance of the transition from the match itself to the closing ceremony in 33<sup>rd</sup> minute. Our research goal is to point out the various ways the player teams are represented by during the match and the follow-up ceremony. This is achieved by multiple fragmentary analyses of relevant motives. This analysis does not focus on the questions of broader representation of the teams across multiple matches and different media, but only on this specific recording of the finals. For this reason, we will mention the further context of their careers and the way they are portrayed elsewhere only briefly.

The main pillar of our methodology is *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* by Gunther Kress (2010), where he introduces the multimodal analysis. It is focused on various modes, which are defined as socially and culturally conditioned ways of creating meaning (Kress 2010: 79). For this study we have decided to work with the textual and visual mode, our reason being the importance of their interplay for the analysis of the team representation in the recording. During the analysis we then uncover the emerging meanings of the team representation that were not necessarily a priori explicitly visible in the

<sup>6</sup> The maximum level a champion can reach in a single match is eighteen.

<sup>7</sup> TechACake. "League of Legends player count 2021: how many people play League of Legends?" Accessed November 1, 2021. <https://techacake.com/league-of-legends-player-count/>.

<sup>8</sup> *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*. Valve – Hidden Path Entertainment, 2012.

interactions, which is one of the main points of the multimodal social semiotic analysis as defined by Kress (2010: 54).

Our coding was inspired by Monika Bednarek (2015). This approach is based on using a three-column table, where the first one contains visual and auditive mode, second column is a snapshot of the recording, and the last one describes verbal and non-verbal utterances of the characters (Bednarek 2015: 76–82). We have however slightly altered this approach to better suit our needs and the nature of the analysed material. Due to extent of the textual and visual components, we have transcribed both modes to separate tables with timestamps to clarify their boundaries and we have reconnected them again in the next steps of our analysis – at first, we have focused on each of the modes respectively and then we interconnected them based on their timestamps for a holistic view of the recording. Due to the fact that the analysed sequence of the recording is narratively split into two parts – the game itself with professional commentary, and follow-up winner ceremony with short interviews with the players, we have structured our paper according to this division.

## 2 Visual components of the match

The first and arguably the most comprehensive topic is the visual level of the match recording. The main focus of the recording up until 33<sup>rd</sup> minute is the in-game environment of *League of Legends*. In the context of virtual reality are both teams represented based on contrasting color coding. The team starting in the lower left corner (DWG in this particular case) is always the blue one and the team in opposing upper right corner (SN) is red. This color differentiation is the prime and the most striking aspect of representation of both teams. The color coding is one of the most crucial components of the visual design due to its association with the culture-based symbolism of specific hues according to Machin (2016: 85–88). In the western culture complex, where *League of Legends* originated, the color blue is most commonly associated with rationality, water, and calmness, whereas red is connected to aggression, fire, and ferocity. However, it is necessary to consider the fact that this color coding is not based on the specific teams in question (and if we had different opponents, the colors would not be yellow and green for example), but it is a part of wider trend in the gaming industry, where the blue-red opposition is chosen due to technical reasons and to increase visual clarity and fidelity. That being said, we cannot ignore the fact, that the DWG uniforms contain blue accents, and it could be argued that the blue side was assigned to them on purpose in this match. SN team clothing is predominantly black with distinctive yellow-orange lion, which may symbolize ferocity. Due to this we can again hypothesize the connection between this fact and the red in-game color. The above-mentioned culture connotations in connection with the results of the match may evoke the idea, that the rational and calm blue DWG triumphs over the more aggressive and impetuous SN, which in turn confirms the stereotype of superiority of reason above strong emotions.



Fig.1 Match interface in 33:27 of the recording.

Besides the in-game events, the recording is supplemented by several other levels of player and team representation (see fig. 1). The upper area of the screen is dedicated to a summary of the current match as a whole. We can see the total sum of gold earned by both teams, number of structures they have destroyed, how many enemy champions they have defeated, team logos with visualization of won games in the series and the condition of other game objectives.<sup>9</sup> Further down, both sides of the screen are dedicated to champion portraits above which we can find the nickname of each participant playing the given character. These miniatures are accompanied by the current amount of health and mana of the champion and time remaining until their most powerful ability (*ultimate*) becomes available. Alongside this we can see visualizations of *summoner spells*<sup>10</sup> and *rune keystone*,<sup>11</sup> the players chose for this match. The bottom area contains numerous interface elements. The right corner is dedicated to the mini-map, which is once more blue-red color coded and miniature portraits of the champions can be seen moving around it. The mini map is diagonally divided by the light blue river, everything closer to the bottom left corner is blue and belongs to DWG, whereas structures belong to SN and are red, which creates two distinct territories. The left corner contains alternating logos of the championship sponsors. These sponsors are usually connected to specific teams through contracts that state they must present them during public play and events (Taylor 2018: 171). Moving into the middle from these two features we can continuously see camera shots at the players themselves. They are either shown in pairs<sup>12</sup> according to their in-game roles in the match or we can see both teams in their entirety. The middle is dominated by a table with the detailed score of each participant (see fig. 2).

<sup>9</sup> Defeated dragons and the element they were associated with.

<sup>10</sup> Two abilities the player can pick, which are independent on the champion played.

<sup>11</sup> A representative of wider array of runes the player chose for the match. These runes offer champions minor bonuses to many of their parameters.

<sup>12</sup> Nuguri – Bin, Showmaker – Angel, Ghost – Huangfeng, Canyon – SofM, Beryl – SwordArt.



Level	Champion	K/D/A	Score	Bounty	Items	Status
26	Yasuo	2/0/12	190	150G	Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive
37	Yasuo	8/0/7	178	700G	Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive
25	Yasuo	1/3/5	262	75G	Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive
34	Yasuo	9/1/5	256	700G	Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive
95	Yasuo	4/3/4	45	300G	Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive
30	Yasuo	2/9/1	173		Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive
47	Yasuo	1/5/2	219		Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive
19	Yasuo	2/2/0	250		Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive
5	Yasuo	2/4/2	203		Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive
33	Yasuo	0/4/3	33		Plated Steelcaps, Berserker's Greaves, Infinity Edge, Phantom Dancer, Blood-Seeker's Axe, Blood-Seeker's Sash	Alive

Fig. 2 Score table in 33:29 of the recording.

Here we can see starting from the middle the chosen *champions* and their status (if they are dead at the moment the portrait is grey and covered by countdown until resurrection in seconds), number of defeated *minions*,<sup>13</sup> score of the players in *KDA*<sup>14</sup> format above which the bounty for defeating is shown if applicable,<sup>15</sup> icons depicting purchased items and on the outer rim the variant of support items available to all *champions* without difference. It is worth mentioning that during replays, the majority of these elements is not present, and the only things present besides the in-game environment is the mini-map in the same place and simplified summary of the status of all the *champions* in the middle of the lower edge of the screen. This summary tells us only the state of their *ultimate*, *summoner spells*, whether they live and are visible on the screen (if not, their portrait is in the shades of grey). These details are often amplified in comparison to the regular display of supporting information – their primary purpose is to help the viewers better orient themselves in the match (Taylor 2018: 231). Regarding all of the above-mentioned specifics, such as *champion* choice and purchased items, we need to consider the fact, that these features of representation are dictated by the game strategy and the need to react to the choices of their opponents given by the professional level of play in question. This is also a way of the team representation in a way because both teams identify with the established paradigm of the professional play through these choices and demonstrate their knowledge of the game and its principles, firmly rooting them in the identity of high-profile gamers. Furthermore, we could analyse the choice of *skins*<sup>16</sup> in this match and their meaning, which is however above the scope of this study. By doing this we would be questioning the visual design of *League of Legends*, alongside personal inclinations of individual players rather than representation of the teams as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

Just as the direct in-game representation, the above discussed elements are visibly divided by teams. The middle of the screen is divided by imaginary line, everything to the left of it (excluding the sponsors) references DWG and the right side belongs to SN with exception of the mini map, which is as discussed divided into blue and red side. The upper panel with overall score is also color coded with blue-left and red-right sides. If we consider the overall intention of this virtual-visual representation, we can surmise that the goal of the composition of the information

<sup>13</sup> Non-player characters, which are significant source of in-game gold.

<sup>14</sup> Kills/Deaths/Assists.

<sup>15</sup> This reward increases with the number of kills given player scored without dying himself.

<sup>16</sup> Alternative looks player can pick for their champion.

<sup>17</sup> Example of such research is delivered by Bell (2017), who analyses of connection between sexualization and *champion* choice.



and color coding is to create obvious and easily readable contrast between the two teams. At the same time, they are however closely linked together through the principle of visual contrasting (Machin 2016: 180–184). Red and blue just as left and right stand in binary opposition to each other. In this context they would lose their meaning if presented alone and their juxtaposition also reinforces the inevitable conflict that is taking place.

Furthermore, on the visually virtual level we are often faced with major discrepancies between the in-game events and cameras displaying the players in real world. For example, at the start of the analysed segment we can see Canyon and SofM on the cameras, however the in-game footage displays *champions* belonging to Canyon, Nuguri and Bin. This is caused by the discussed pairing of the players according to roles in the match. During the first minutes of the game, when players stay in the area connected with their role (e.g. Angel and Showmaker are *mid lane*, meaning they focus on the cross-river diagonal) this connection works relatively well, nevertheless in the analysed footage from the conclusion of the game players move all around the map, causing imbalanced visualization. This creates very interesting case of non-representation, which is according to Machin (2016: 146–147): “*the case where a certain category of people are not represented in the pictures of settings where they are in fact present or in events in which they do in fact participate.*” The cameras display one pair of players at the given moment, however the virtual environment shows completely different cast knowing, that the players from the camera shots are somewhere “off screen”. Expanding on this, for most of the recording we see only some of the participants of the in-game events (and we never see the commentators at all) despite the fact all of them directly shape the material presented. The possible reasons for this include technical limitations, desire to improve clarity for viewers and the aim to display exciting plays rather than focus on more balanced and holistic picture of the entire match.

### 3 Professional commentary of the match

The main motive present in the textual (or more precisely verbal) mode, represented by the discussion of the commentators, can be characterized as favoritism of the blue team DWG and its players through positive comments. Compared to SN they are spoken about as better players, which is done mainly through superlatives and other positively themed word structures such as “*heavy favourites*,” “*gold standard*,” “*exquisite performance*,” “*the best looking LCK team*,” or “*superstars*.” DWG is represented positively even through sentence syntax, which can be seen on the following example: “*He didn’t really have a flash but the good news is they’re not gonna get much on the back of it from the perspective of Damwon.*” The *he* pronoun refers to a specific SN player, who did not use one of his abilities in the given moment, which is detrimental for SN in this situation. The *they* pronoun implies that the sentence is said from the perspective of SN, however through the use of the *but* connective it shifts its attention to the DWG – being only obvious from the rest of the sentence “*from the perspective of Damwon.*” This is supported by the way the postscript is delivered – the commentator says it after a short pause, as if he realized he needs to specify who is he talking about after finishing the sentence. Positive representation of the team is also visible through comments about the player Ghost<sup>18</sup> in 27<sup>th</sup> minute. He is depicted as hard-working, ambitious, and humble person, while also being a valuable part of the team. The statement is concluded by the words “*My boy Ghost is on a killing spree*,” which explicitly demonstrates Ghosts popularity through familiar, friendly designation and at the same time manifests his gaming skill. However, Ghost does not make significant appearance on screen during this over a minute long quote, thus we cannot say the commentary is always determined

<sup>18</sup> Named Jang Yong-jun in real world.

by the camera focus on player *champions* in the match, rather it is subjective decision of the commentators that dictates the way teams and players are represented. This also reinforces the theme of non-representation mentioned earlier. Throughout the commentary, DWG is pictured as the better of both teams, the ideal team and the winners of the match even before the game is actually over, as can be seen in this statement: “*You feel like the game is just so handily in control of Damwon, it feels like there’s no way in which they can really lose this game.*”

On the other side, SN is represented in the commentary less frequently – they focus more on DWG, leaving less space for their rivals and furthermore the connotations are mostly negative, through comparing their shortcomings to the success of the eventual victors. This is done primarily through sentence structure, which negates the preceding praise and magnifies the weight of consequence (“*Angel – while he’s able to get the kill onto Beryl, he’s still being kept out of the fight.*” “*Very well played for Bin here, but he invested so much.*” or “*They’ve shown multiple times that they will fight to the death, but Bin’s just gonna facecheck.*”<sup>19</sup> “*That’s it, he’s just dead.*”). Combined with the frequent usage of negatively themed vocabulary (“*cursed*,” evoking some sort of a priori given inability of the team to win, “*very scary*,” “*final nail in the coffin*” and “*last ditch effort*,” implying the desperate situation SN is in), we believe the comments about SNs manoeuvres show them in worse light than DWG is being depicted and all that falls beyond the scope of objective commentary of the game strategy. This however can be explained by the overall approach to gaming commentary, which is based more on experimentation and concordance with their specific community, rather than keeping to the conventions of sports commentary and its objectivity (Taylor 2018: 222).

## 4 Visual and textual aspects of the post-match event

After the match ends in 33<sup>rd</sup> minute we can see a major shift in the entire recording as we move from mostly virtual reality to the setting of the championship hall. Both teams leave the isolated boxes<sup>20</sup> from which they played the match. Once more, the boxes were colour coded – blue one for DWG and red for SN, which connects the representation in the virtual world with the real one. We must not forget that this is still based on the general principles of *League of Legends* visual design rather than the specific teams in question.

The main aspect of visual representation of both teams are their uniforms. SN exits their box dressed in predominantly black attire adorned with the team logo and logos of their sponsors. The black monochrome is interrupted by white t-shirts again with the team logo and the nickname of the player on the back, these are however covered by black hoodie (except for SofM as visible in 35:12). The logo of the Chinese team SN is a yellow lion with an orange mane, white lower part of the face and a blue lightning in the middle of its forehead. This design is probably based in Chinese Buddhist mythology where similar lions symbolize strength and serve as protectors of significant structures and shrines (Feltham 2010: 111–113). The lion can be interpreted both as being the protector of SN and the symbol of their personal strength and ferocity, which should lead them to victory. The dominant black colour has different connotations in the Chinese culture than in the western culture group. In the Taoist tradition, black is seen as a neutral colour connected with water and it is the king of all colours, symbolizing Tao, the Way, which all beings

<sup>19</sup> *Facecheck* is an in-game situation, when player enters area where he lacks vision, thus allowing his enemies to ambush him.

<sup>20</sup> A part of covid-prevention measures no doubt, as usually the teams play in open space opposite to each other.

of the world should stride. Rather than the mourning connotation common in the West,<sup>21</sup> it represents selflessness and nobleness of the entire team and their right heading (Li 2014: 708).

DWG team uniforms on the other hand are dominantly white with light blue elements. The references to the sponsors and team logo, which we will discuss later, are minimalistic on these uniforms, but each of the players has their in-game nickname printed both on the t-shirt and the hoodie. Due to the fact that DWG is also team of Asian origin, we need to interpret their uniforms in the context of the traditions of their homeland. In the Korean colour symbolism is the colour white connected with truth, purity, and death, whereas blue is the colour of creativity, immortality, and hope (Shin 2012). In connection with the context of esports this colour scheme can evoke hopes for victory through their innovative game strategies, their flawless execution, and the following death (defeat) of their opponents.

The visual representation of both teams is strongly influenced by the principles of homogenization and categorization in displaying participants (Machin 2016: 142–145). The individuality of players is suppressed through the use of uniforms, which creates the image of harmony and close cooperation regardless of qualitative differences between each player, such as their usual role in the game. Without the camera shots during the match itself the unknowing viewer could hardly discern,<sup>22</sup> which of the team members controlled which *champion* and in SNs case would not be able to figure out their identity at all with a single exception. Another homogenizing element is the correspondence of the players with the “geek gamer” stereotype. All ten players have practically the same haircut, five of them wear glasses of the similar blocky design and black rims. The main differences are visible only in their facial features and body proportions. While this stereotypical categorization is almost certainly not intentional, it further reinforces the image of the players as people, who are “in their element” and the viewers can expect high-quality professional in-game performance from them.

We are again met with the theme of non-representation when it comes to the physical presence of the players and teams at the championship. After the players have left their boxes and shake the hands of their opponents the SN players disappear in the backstage of the stadium in the 35<sup>th</sup> minute, and we never see them again in the recording in a meaningful way. The only minor exception is when they appear in the in-game replays that are used to bridge the gap between the end of the ceremony and start of the post-match analysis, which however can be hardly considered proper representation. While it is understandable that the majority of attention will be focused on the winners of the championship at this point in the recording, the interplay of this fact with the other examples of underrepresentation of SN only reinforces the feeling that they are viewed as “the other” team and not really relevant in this case.

During the second part of the recording, we can see numerous billboards and projection screens that display the name of the winners, Damwon Gaming, or various slogans representing them – typographical elements, which are crucial for multimodal analysis according to Machin (2016). The often-repeated name of the team can be seen right after the match is over as it appears in several variations on numerous billboards. One of these is written in capitals, cursive and deep red using the Steelfish font or one of its variants as far as we can discern with our layman’s eye. This style of script is obviously bold, which according to Machin (2016: 109) connotes the emphasis on the written text, which corresponds with this situation, as the name of the winning team is without a doubt crucial for the esports championship. From the font, which is arguably hard, with sharp edges implying gravity and immutability together with the use of capitals we

<sup>21</sup> While this connotation exists in the Chinese culture, it makes much less sense in the context of professional team than the positive one.

<sup>22</sup> Shots including the backs of the players, where the nicknames are places, are uncommon.

can deduce the emphasizing function of this particular inscription. Machin (2016: 116) connects this with the interpersonal metafunction of language, which is when, in our case the text, expresses the attitude to the conveyed information. What however might cause certain confusion is the used colour. As discussed above, DWG was closely connected with the colour blue in this match from the details on their uniforms to their in-game coloration. Despite this, the logo uses deep red colour very close to the red used by SN. The simplest explanation here is that the inscription's colour is used as a contrasting element in opposition to the remainder of visual components, coloured reflectors, and other LED lights, which display bright blue. While from purely technical viewpoint this makes sense, the perspective of analysis of team representation leads us to question, whether this choice could not lead to confusion among the viewers. It could also connote the idea of DWGs victory completely overwriting and erasing the existence of SN team which is conveniently not physically present and visible in this segment at all.

Another example of text-based representation is the usage of the team logo at the time<sup>23</sup> on the middle projection screen. The placement in the middle of the projection screens and through this in the middle of the game hall grants the logo a position of prestige and gravity. This is further developed during the shots displaying the trophy for the victors, where the logo is directly behind the cup. Furthermore, this is where the medals are awarded to the players and short interviews take place. Unlike the earlier analysed inscription, which was most probably decided by the production team of the championship, this is direct representation of the winning team. Their logo is written in rounded white script (probably Verdana or Roboto) in capitals with the two syllables of the word Damwon divided by blue graphics. This division may reference the common practice of transcription of *hangul* according to the rules for romanization of Korean, which is done through the use of hyphen.<sup>24</sup> The chosen colours are in tune with the earlier discussed colour symbolism in Korean culture. The script itself (especially in contrast with the above analysed writing which is visible simultaneously) connotes feeling of amiability and lower rigidity through its rounded nature.

Another interesting textual component are the words “FROM ICONS TO IDOLS,” which appear in several colour variations during the awards ceremony and the interviews. The script is the same as the first analysed example – bold sharp Steelfish font. The coloration of the letters switches between red-orange and lavender purple, both on dark blue background, which contradicts connotations with either of the teams. The coloration however is in sync with visual components present during these events – we can see pinkish purple lights and similarly coloured holographic. What is relevant to the team representation are the contents of the inscription. The winning team is referred to as icons turning to idols, which in the scope of religious connotations implies the shift of DWG from players capable of great deeds and experts in *League of Legends* to players that embody the ideal gaming performance – calling the team idols promotes them to an object worthy of respect and praise bordering with piety (Klimeš 1985).

## 5 Verbal level of the post-match event

The last part of our analysis is focuses on a series of short interviews, which were conducted with some of the DWG players after they were declared world champions. It is worth mentioning that this segment was not commented by the moderators from the first part but by a single female

<sup>23</sup> The team has since changed their name to DWG KIA and has a different logo than during the 2020 championship.

<sup>24</sup> This is most often present when Romanizing Korean names. Above mentioned Ghost, real name 장용준, is transcribed as Jang Yong-jun.

reporter along with Korean and Chinese translators. The first noticeable theme is the positive light in which SN is viewed by their opponents, which creates a contrast to the commentary we have discussed above. Of the two questions asking for DWG's reaction to SN, the red team was in both cases referred to in a positive light as experienced players and strong, hardly predictable opponents. The questions and the answers explicitly praise specific game strategies of SN, e.g.: *"And also throughout this special fight Suning is good at engaging all the team fights..."*, *"Suning was really good at looking at the opening for team fight and the team fight execution was on point..."* or *"...your opponent team Suning is well known due to unexpected drafts and plays, so how do you feel about playing against them and playing against Bin?"*, where we can also find praise of a specific SN player and his skills. More attention is however paid to the DWG as the winners, which is to be considered natural given the situation.

Very often we can see DWG identified with the entire South Korean professional esports scene, referred to as LCK (*League of Legends Champions Korea*). This theme was already present in the professional commentary of the match, where one of the speakers says: *"...they are so close to securing themselves the world's champions title and bringing glory back to the LCK."* Here we can see not only attributing DWG with the champion title on individual level, but also the burden of representing the entire Korean gaming community and their responsibility for restoring the fame of their country. Through this DWG becomes the embodiment and representation of the LCK itself, rather than being a separate team of its own. This is also visible during the champions ceremony, where we can hear: *"After three years, LCK lifted the trophy again..."* Here we can also infer that in the past years South Korean teams were not very successful, which further adds to the gravity of DWG's victory and achievement. Even the players themselves accept this role as paragons of the LCK and their role for the wider community: *"...we are the starters that proved [to] the world that we can kind of restore the glory of the LCK."* Thus while at first glance the artificial identification of DWG with LCK, which removes the personal achievement of the team, can be seen as attempt at homogenization of the gaming scene, we can see that the actors themselves are fully aware of this role and willing to accept, reflect and identify with it and its another layer of representation in the world of esports.

## 6 Conclusion

Using multimodal analysis, we have attempted to reveal the ways of representing DWG and SN teams during the recording of the 2020 *League of Legends* world championship. We have uncovered several crucial motives which construct the image of the teams of their specific players.

DWG, connected with the colour blue, is represented as exceptionally capable team with above average gaming skills through the professional commentary. They were able to defeat their opponents using rational manoeuvres. This is done mainly using superlatives and expressive language, which does not correspond with the idea of objective commentary of the in-game situations. This is further amplified by the colour symbolism of creative blue and precise white of their team uniforms. A particular player, Ghost, is significantly overrepresented in the dialogue of the commentators, which raises questions about the presence of explicit favouritism. At the same time DWG is seen as the embodiment and representation of the entire South Korean professional gaming community in *LoL*. Based on their own words, they not only accept this connection, but also feel responsible for bringing glory to their nation and colleagues. The in-game representation based on the colour blue may be connected with calmness and harmony, which led DWG to victory in the end, however we need to consider the need for visual clarity of the streamed



event. Another noteworthy aspect was when the commentators called the team icons and idols, which further cements their image as world champions and exceptionally capable players.

On the other hand, SN is in comparison underrepresented in the commentary, they are linked with defeat and their strategic shortcomings are accentuated. This is once more done through used lexicon and sentence structure that puts their failures above other facts. During the interviews with DWG players however, we can hear them describing SN as worthy opponents, which limits the negative connotations only to the professional commentary. If we consider their in-game colour and the team logo, we may infer that the team is construed as rash and fierce, which might have caused their defeat. The physical representation through team uniforms connotes nobility and the right heading of the entire team. SN is again underrepresented on the physical level through their near absence in the post-game camera shots – after their defeat, they are present only on the textual level during interviews with the winners.

On the physical level both teams are represented in a similar fashion. Here we can find themes of homogenization and stereotyping of the players. Almost all players look uniform – we can see nearly identical haircuts and often glasses, which embodies the geek or gamer stereotype. This can point to their interest in videogames and at the same time set our expectations of quality gaming performance, which led them all the way to the world championship – such physical stereotyping can serve as a guarantee of an interesting match. By wearing team uniforms their individuality is suppressed, which serves to represent the teams as homogenic undivided units.

As we can see, the question of esports player representation, both at team and individual level, is a broad spectrum of topics, that requires more attention as the gaming industry and esports scene grow. When it comes to esports, the relevance of the professional level of play is as important as the casual level not only due to its ontological aspect but also thanks to the impact it has on the “regular” players. The professional scene influences the heading of the game itself as well as its community and individual players become an organic structure which reacts to the development of the elites gaming paradigm. The analysis of the professional player representation at the world championship thus allows deeper insight into the mechanics of such event as well as into the inner workings of the gaming community and its relationship to the gaming industry (and vice versa) as a whole.

Further questions that this research raises include the analysis of the non-verbal communication of the individual players in order to determine if it goes against aforementioned team homogenization. This could be supplemented by focusing on the camera work of the recording, which influences our perception of the players and the match as a whole in a major way. Another option is to expand the data by considering the player agency on the in-game level, which is represented by their choice of *champion skins* and other purely visual flair. Last but not least the analysis could be expanded to include entirety of the 2020 championship for individual players or teams or to focus on their entire *LoL* career.

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## Deniz Özdemir

Department of Longevity Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague,  
Czech Republic  
ORCID: 0000-0001-7526-4965

## Olga Štěpánková

Department of Biomedical Engineering and Assistive Technology, Czech Institute of Informatics,  
Robotics and Cybernetics, The Czech Technical University in Prague, Czech Republic  
ORCID: 0000-0002-4384-1868

## Iva Holmerová

Department of Longevity Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague, Czech  
Republic  
ORCID: 0000-0003-2375-4174

# Anthropological Implications of Robotic Systems for Senior People

**Abstract** | In our digital world, social robots are becoming widely phenomenal and are being designed to simplify and help with our everyday chores (Breazeal 2003). Older population is rapidly growing worldwide, requiring an increasing amount of care, hence, technological media, namely assistive robots may be an effective method to address the growing demand for care (van Kemenade – Hoorn – Konijn 2018: 1712). It entails prominence to scholars and professionals of social robotics to comprehend the elements that promote healthy communications between humans and robots, yielding positive user evaluations, especially from senior individuals (Sundar et al. 2017). With proper guidelines in place before the introduction of robots en masse into society, these machines could enhance the lives of the aging population, reducing their dependence also bringing further openings for social interaction (Sharkey – Sharkey 2012b). Besides, significantly enough, addressing the expectations of seniors in fact allows them to live a fulfilling life (Carstensen 2011). Whilst robotic systems could accrue a plethora of benefits and assist the lives of the seniors, human robot interaction design is worth analysing with respect to the ethical and anthropological questions such as the loss of privacy, loss of control, infantilization, attribution of responsibility, loss of human contact, emotional deception, and emotional attachment. In this perspective, we go into this balance between benefit and risk through the eye of human-robot relationships (Prescott – Robillard 2020).

**Keywords** | Anthropology, Companion robots, Robotics, Robot ethics, Senior Care

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## 1 Introduction

The interest in building artificial intelligence can be traced back since the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century by a play named *R.U.R (Rossumovi Univerzální Roboti – Rossum's Universal Robots)*, hence the Czech word *robota* meaning the forced labour (Thórisson 1996).

A robot is defined as a machine with a specific mechanism which is able to operate by making sense of the environment and is also able to make logical judgements and predictions accordingly. Artificial intelligence, on the other hand, is the definition of a technology that models the functionalities of human intelligence and maps as cognition, learning, reasoning, judgement, memory and natural language processing, and social robot is designed specifically to engage with humans and bond with emotions (Choi et al. 2019). Therefore, a social robot can be perceived as another human. It utilizes artificial intelligence technology, because, by design, it has the capability to integrate its circuitry with cameras and sensors to recognize sounds, make eye contact, present gestures and adapt to its user by responding to negative or positive feedback (Lathan – Ling 2019).

As of now, remote telepresence robots and companion-type robots are the two kinds of artificial intelligence technologies in use. Remote telepresence robots utilize video conference technology along with mobile robotic appliances, focusing the attention to more remote human-human interaction. On the other hand, companion robots are designed to foster a prominent technology to meet particular human psychological needs by enabling not only human-human, but also human-robot interaction with mutual care, attachment and companionship (Kollin et al. 2013). Such robots may help in simplifying certain day-to-day activities of senior cohort, as well as handicapped population, both enhancing their autonomy and performing useful chores such as giving medication or serving food (Herstatt – Kohlbacher – Bauer 2011; Goeldner – Herstatt – Tietze 2015; Melkas et al. 2016). In the next section, we aim to provide the notable examples of robotic technologies and explore how the technology affects the users. Later, ethical challenges and anthropological implications are explained. Finally, the conclusion and future directions are explored.

## 2 Robotics: Use cases from current social care system

To this date, wide selection of robots have been implemented to assist senior people to support independent living, varying from service robots, including Aibo (Fujita 2001), Care-O-bot (Graf – Hans – Schraft 2004), Hobbit (Fischinger et al. 2016), iCat (van Breemen – Yan – Meerbeek 2005: 143–144), Pearl (Pollack et al. 2002), Robocare (Cesta et al. 2007) and Robot-Era (Cavallo et al. 2014) robots. On the other hand, companion robots were developed to further aid the aging population to provide emotional support such as Companionable (Badii et al. 2009: 118), Giraff (Coradeschi et al. 2011), GiraffPlus (Coradeschi et al. 2014), Huggable (Stiehl et al. 2016: 1290–1291), MARIO (Barrett et al. 2019), Paro (Diaz-Orueta – Hopper – Konstantinidis 2020) and nursing care robot RIBA (Mukai et al. 2010).

Among variety of robotic assistants, we choose to explore three different prototypes in advanced stage of development that spark interest in care settings. First one called Care-O-Bot, being implemented by the Fraunhofer Institute for Manufacturing Engineering and Automation (IPA), in Germany has the appearance of a butler. This butler performs a plethora of delivery activities for people, carrying water for seniors, recognizing and chatting with the residents. Not only it helps seniors in care environment, the robot then inspects its daily work routine and contributes useful information for medical practitioners (e.g documenting water intake of patients to doctors for further analysis) (Goeldner – Herstatt – Tietze 2015).

Similarly, another example robot in healthcare sector named Pearl, is determined to aid seniors in a rest-home setting (Pollack et al. 2002). Pearl's design principle is to guide humans in the nursing centre, reminding their medication times and doctor appointments. One of the trivial findings of the study implied that the settings must be oriented and customized to different individuals based on their hearing ability and walking speeds (Pineau et al. 2003). Likewise, social agents targeting older participants' health-related tasks (eg. physical exercises) are being developed (Fasola – Matarić 2013).

Secondly, another type of robot 'Paro' was developed by Takanori Shibata at the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST) in Japan, also being the first commercially available care-bot. Paro was implemented specifically for people with dementia, shaped as a baby seal making movements, and research shows that it has a therapeutic effect on patients (Taggart – Turkle – Kidd 2005) and animal assisted therapies are becoming widely used especially in the USA (Gammonley – Yates 1991). On the other hand, majority of hospitals and nursing homes prohibit the possession of pets, especially in Japan, because they are afraid of the negative impact of animals on human beings, such as allergic reactions, infections, bites, and scratches (Shibata – Wada 2011). In order to bring a solution to this problem, animal shaped robots came forward.

Paro was created to look particularly friendly with glowing happy eyes, soft fur and seniors like to play with this adorable pet companion (Broadbent 2017). A randomized controlled trial revealed that Paro decreased loneliness and increased social communications (Robinson et al. 2013) but the responses were fairly mixed, while some seniors enjoyed engaging with their cute pet companion, others neglected them entirely (Robinson – Broadbent – MacDonald 2015, 2016). More comprehensive and detailed reviews observed with residents aging 55–100 in New Zealand (Robinson et al. 2013), Denmark & United States (Shibata 2012) and the Netherlands (Bemelmans et al. 2015) indicate that PARO decreased loneliness, improved the mood state while promoting conversations, improved the condition of patients with depression and showed effectiveness for interventions aiming at a therapeutic effect (Kohei et al. 2021).

Third example is RIBA, developed and utilized in nursing-care facilities in Japan, that can lift a human in its arms using a tactile guidance technology. This method, where the caregiver indicates the position, direction, and/or speed of the desired motion by directly touching the robot on the part that is concerned with the movement, ensuring communication and safety, transferring a human from a bed to a wheelchair and back (Mukai et al. 2010). Researchers conducted patient transfer tests using 10 adults (one male and nine females) and RIBA has successfully lifted down the patient to the bed and the wheelchair in the reverse process (Mukai et al. 2011).

### 3 Robotics: Challenges on ethics and anthropology

When there is already a variety of options to choose from among these devices, studies show that some questions still remain up to debate in ethical and philosophical terms. A robot named Henry with anthropomorphic features, that is being used in an Austrian care institution is one example. Henry patrols through the corridors, welcomes visitors, accompanies patients to physiotherapy sessions. As the robot is connected to the Internet, it can collect, store and share private data, and the device has the ability to learn about the environment and reach autonomous decisions (Körtner 2016). Similarly, Bickmore and Picard implemented a computer based virtual relational agent acting as a day-to-day exercise coach to communicate with people. The agent is not only tracking the overall exercise progress, but also checking the well-being of the users by asking subjective questions. Hence, the process within the robot fabricates an iterative calibration

mechanism based on the data it receives from the user, sparking curiosity regarding privacy and ethical decisions. Sharkey and Sharkey (2012a; 2012b) have pointed out that using robots for monitoring could lead to infringements of the right to privacy (e. g. Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Correspondingly, findings from an empirical research performed in Finland at a senior care centre show that, the overall impression with a robotic assistant was positive. Then again, the role of ethics was a key issue as well (Melkas 2016). Consequently, such advancements therefore stir up ethical debates in the industry.

Theoretically, technological devices can perform any type of task, however, one shall debate on whether they should, since for such robots to be accepted and integrated into society, they must be designed and implemented in a way that they are ethically safe (Nestorov et al. 2014). First of all, as ethics should continuously reflect on what is best for society, it can also change. The most critical questions are those of privacy and data protection, safety and responsibility as well as involvement of users and deception. However, as Ileana et al. (2018) conclude in their descriptive review of over 500 articles addressing the ethical design of robotics, the list of ethical topics raised appears rather scarce. The review states that majority of such technologies were developed without any explicit ethical consideration. Examples include the loss of privacy, loss of control, attribution of responsibility, loss of human contact, emotional attachment, emotional deception and infantilization (Bracken-Roche et al. 2017; Coeckelbergh 2010; van Maris et al. 2021; Prescott – Robillard 2020; Sharkey – Sharkey 2012a, 2020; Sparrow – Sparrow 2006; Sullins 2012; Turkle 2017). If we explore each concept briefly, starting with loss of privacy; there is a risk that monitoring could infringe on the right to privacy. The privacy of people in general should be respected (see Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Privacy can be defined both as a right, but also as a generally perceived human value (Sharkey – Sharkey 2012a). Unintended risk related to attribution of responsibility and loss of control is characterized by a case study from Canada (Lehoux – Grimard 2018), in which one of the participants sheds light to the debate: *“if every time we forget our glasses we say ‘Tim, go fetch my glasses,’ we won’t even try to remember ... Will it have an impact on our memory?”* The risk of failure which could threaten to one’s good health was also underlined: *“what does the poor lady or poor gentleman [...] who has a beautiful robot [...] but which breaks while they’re ready to take their drugs? A machine, it’s unreliable and it can break”*. Loss of human contact, on the other hand, may be seen as stripping seniors of social interaction with their peers and that is not explicitly addressed by human rights legislation. Such a statement is perhaps implied in Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”*, or Article 9, *“No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile”* (Sharkey – Sharkey 2012a). Emotional attachment is defined as the accumulation of emotional episodes of the individual’s perception and experience with the technological medium in variety of circumstances (Norman 2004; Huber – Weiss – Rauhala 2016). Furthermore, when the senior people will get used to the conversation with a robotic system, the moral risk becomes rather a deception – meaning that they could project too much of an emotion and empathy to these technologies and shall later create a confusion and loss of a feeling, because of the abstract gap of what the robotic companion should be and how it is in real life (Koimizu – Kato 2017; Weng – Hirata 2018). Furthermore, infantilization may occur when encouraging seniors to interact with robots as if they were companions (Cortellessa et al. 2021).

## 4 Robotics: Perspective of moral anthropology

The robot's own perception of decision-making process is a curious thing, whether as it derives from a shared appeal to common norms or simply a technological segmentation.

Moral aspect of social robots differs in time and space, particularly due to the fact that the humans assign meanings to them, while social roles in a society have an undeniable impact too. Morality is a collaborative effort to be built upon the efforts of people. Humans are not very good at mental planning and setting up intentional goals before executing intentional plans and actions. Besides, humans are not considered to be flawless in applying moral duties and principles in their lives. They even find the significant matters of the fundamentals of morality confusing (Kadar 2019).

An anthropocentric aspect suggests that solely humans possess an intrinsic value. Conversely, anthropocentrism assumes; as people have moral advantage over all other living organisms (moral anthropocentrism) and only humans contain the required knowledge mechanism in order to process the rightful capacity of judgement (epistemic anthropocentrism) (Krebs 1997). Applying anthropological foundations into robotic companions bring us back to the roots of the Aristotelian understanding, where 'man' stands as the pivot rests (Loh 2019). A constructivist paradigm is present in the field of anthropology, which states that both cultural and cognitive functions are not as symbolic and arbitrary implications onto the realism, but rooted in human's capacity and their communication with the place where they interact, inhabit and think (Adenzato – Garbarini 2006).

Mosemghvdlishvili and Jansz (2013) state that:

an anthropological perspective is suited for sociotechnical analysis or for identifying sites of coproduction. It provides reflexive understanding that phenomena are all at once situated, dynamic, emergent, and in this seemingly conflicted, yet grounded plasticity is the presence of negotiation. When accessed in the creation of regulatory frameworks and policies, for example, it foregrounds a heterogeneity of publics and stakeholders for intelligent technologies constructed to suit a wide range of experiences and contexts, not only those that reproduce hegemonic, normative subscriptions of being.

At this point, Meacham and Studley discuss that an action driven method can be designed, in which, the robot actions are hard coded inside, hence, the robot developers hold action in good robotics. A design framework encompasses the following principles involved in implementing the ethical behaviour of a care robot (Poulsen – Burmeister – Tien 2018): a machine ethics school of thought, a set of the ethics, ethics-delivery method and exemplary robot design. Therefore, a care robot design that is ethical by its nature can determine the rightful context in this sense (Meacham – Studley 2017). On the other hand, Shaw et.al (2018) propose a moral robotics model to replicate human-like learning curve and evolving through time and this framework provides the robot to justify its own actions. This level of work obtains the fundamentals of ethics through its own robot brain to check the variables in its system in order to find a suitable conclusion for its decisions. At this point, machine ethicists may additionally distinguish moral and good robot frameworks aiming to address the machine ethics question as well.

## 5 Conclusion

It is evident that robotic technologies are starting to take their place in care settings offering a number of useful activities for older generation. In our paper, we have looked at the use cases of robotic assistants as well as some of the benefits such as helping seniors to bring their medication, invoke positive feelings and decrease loneliness. As a matter of fact, if these technologies are studied effectively, their assistance shall empower the society. However, since machines are generally optimized by their programming structures, they may unsettle individuals' intuitions regarding the ethical circumstances. On the other hand, adaptive technologies such as robotics, rather rely on the embodied interactions which shall be thoroughly observed and tested against ethical implications. Perhaps, investigating the robots' capabilities to a certain extend regarding their functional autonomy and their understanding of humans would help researchers to further understand why such devices behave the way they do. Before we rush headlong into the enthusiastic use of these devices, it could be beneficial to establish appropriate guidelines for their use. Guidelines will need considerable consultation and research with the potential clients of the systems including the seniors, their families and professional groups (Sharkey – Sharkey 2012).

Future research could investigate reliable measurement units from social psychological research to complement current advancements in order to study the behaviour of the robots, its data intake, language processing and attitude towards seniors. Moreover, conducting experiments in a vast variety of cultural background people with generational differences shall also be a valuable direction in order to assess the positive and negative evaluations of robots. Examining the impact of multicultural experiences of human's understanding, emotion and cognition through the interaction with the robots could serve as another possible avenue for future research as well, since our world is becoming increasingly diverse, in part driven by migrations (Ng – Wang – Chan 2017; Lim – Rooksby – Cross 2021). To achieve such technological embracement, seniors need to be involved in the development phase, however, reports claim the concerns and needs are not clearly introduced and particularly identified in the design process. Therefore, a detailed research must be conducted to focus on such implications (Frennert – Östlund 2014).

On the other hand, ethical dilemmas must be studied in detail by observing the effective communication channels between the user and the robot. Commitment to this ever-expanding robotic technology of our digital era would also be a futuristic direction to analyse how seniors' welcome devices into their life. Ethical guidelines on the other hand, must be thoroughly expanded and analysed including not only the patients, but also the nurses and the robot itself as the system could continuously be fed through human-robot interaction with the rightful feedback to effectively get improved.

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# On the Barricades Against Injustice, Violence and Discrimination

**Abstract** | The Netherlands was an important colonial power. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it underwent significant changes from a strongly segregated to a multicultural country. These events are also reflected in the social debate on the colonial legacy, racism and the new view of the history. Authors with migration background significantly contribute to the formation of the society. Therefore, this article introduces the Surinamese-Dutch author Astrid Roemer and the role she has played in the fight against racism and in the black feminism.

**Keywords** | colonial legacy, the new view of the history, counter narratives, racism, black feminism, multiculturalism, female writing, Astrid Roemer

## Introduction

The Netherlands is a multicultural country that underwent major changes during the twentieth century. Society had to cope with the collapse of the colonies and rebuild the country after World War II. Women began to systematically stand up for their rights and migrants (including those from the former colonies) were gradually increasingly integrated into all sectors of public life. People also began to present history from other perspectives, exposing the colonial legacy. A space for telling *counter narratives*<sup>1</sup> also slowly began to emerge.

Writers with migration backgrounds played a vital role in this. This article is consequently about the Dutch-Surinamese writer Astrid Roemer, who constantly reflects current events in her works, articles and interviews. She has often been ahead of her time in terms of touching upon themes that only later became part of the social debate. She has always remained true to herself, however, and questioned all conventional views. We will first look at major milestones of the twentieth century such as decolonisation, migration, feminism and the social debate on the new view of history. All these events have been reflected in Roemer's oeuvre. The life and work of this great writer will then be introduced, followed by her vision as a writer and her struggle against racism and sexism.

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<sup>1</sup> A narrative is a lens through which we look at the world. It is incredibly important to realise that narratives are not neutral. The dominant narrative (the master narrative) was imposed by authority figures and as such presented as neutral, but it is not a neutral fact. Counter-narratives share stories of minorities and help us look at events from all sides ("Master Narrative," 2019)

## Milestones of the twentieth century

The Netherlands had long ranked among colonial powers. The Dutch East Indies (current Indonesia)<sup>2</sup> had supplied the kingdom with exotic spices and made the country famous throughout Europe. In contrast, the trade in the Dutch West Indies is much more problematic.<sup>3</sup> The West-Indische Compagnie (WIC, West Indian Company, founded in 1621) was a major player in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the Caribbean plantations employed slaves. Possessing colonies used to be a symbol of prosperity and economic growth, but during the twentieth century (especially after the decolonisation wars) it took on a negative connotation.

After World War II, the number of migrants increased significantly. Many people from the former Dutch East Indies settled in the Netherlands after the sovereignty transfer to Indonesia. From the 1950s, there was a shortage of lower-skilled personnel on the labour market. Guest workers from Greece, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and Yugoslavia were consequently brought to the country. In the 1970s, the number of migrants from Suriname increased. This peaked during Suriname's independence period in 1975. In that year, over 40 thousand Surinamese settled in the Netherlands, in total, around 292 thousand<sup>4</sup> Surinamese migrated to the Netherlands between the years 1948–2000 (Van Eijl, 2009, p.21). According to Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (Statistics Netherlands), as of 1 January 2021 more than 2 million migrants were living in the Netherlands, and of the 15.1 million residents born in the Netherlands, almost two million are children of migrants (CBS, 2021). In total, over 25% of the population is bicultural.<sup>5</sup>

## Feminism

Although women's suffrage, university education and paid work for women had been secured by the first feminist wave (between 1850–1920), women's position in the society in the 1950s was still far from equal to that of men. It was only in 1956 that the law on the legal incapacity of married women was abolished. Joke Kool-Smit's famous article *Het onbehagen bij de vrouw* (Woman's Unease, 1967) was seen by many as the beginning of the second feminist wave. Kool-Smit describes the position of women in society in several areas: labour, education, marriage and family. "De sociale positie van vrouwen wordt dus dubbel door mannen geconditioneerd: in de eerste plaats doordat zij er een hebben, – of niet; in de tweede plaats doordat hun status rechtstreeks afhankelijk is van de positie van hun man." [The social position of women is thus doubly conditioned by men: first, because they have one, – or not; second, because their status is directly dependent on the position of their husbands.] (Kool-Smit, 1984, p. 19). As a result, she

<sup>2</sup> With the foundation of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC, East India Trading Company) in 1602, the trade voyages to Asia began and during the eighteenth century the Netherlands had a trade monopoly in spices in the Indonesian archipelago. Officially, the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) became a colony only in 1798 but the Dutch presence there dates back to the seventeenth century. During World War II, the colony was occupied by Japanese and after their capitulation, Indonesia's independence was declared in 1945. The Netherlands did not want to recognise this and military steps were taken. It was not until 1949 that the Netherlands accepted Indonesia's sovereignty.

<sup>3</sup> Suriname and then Netherlands Antilles belonged to the Dutch West Indies. Profits came mainly from the slave labour on the plantations and the slave trade. Slavery was abolished in Suriname on 1 July 1863.

<sup>4</sup> By comparison, Suriname's total population is 598,000.

<sup>5</sup> Since 2022, Statistics Netherlands began publishing on origin in a different way. Residents born abroad are called *migrants*. If somebody is born in the Netherlands but one or two parents were born abroad, this person is then called *child of a migrant*. The classification by country of origin was made on the basis of continents and common immigration countries (Statistics Netherlands, 2022).

says, women may feel that their own initiative is in vain. The feminist struggle spread throughout the Netherlands thanks to organisations such as Man-Vrouw-Maatschappij (MVM, founded in 1968) and Dolle Mina (1969).

In her article, Joke Smit mentioned an interesting quote from the English weekly *The Economist*: “At present coloured men are in a situation curiously like that of white women: People are willing to let them use certain specialised backroom skills, but most unwilling to give them open authority over white men.” (Kool-Smit, 1984, p. 17). This raises the question, what is the position of the doubly discriminated black woman?

## Black feminism

Speaking at the 1983 Winter University Women’s Studies, Dutch-Moluccan feminist Julia da Lima pointed out that feminism in the Netherlands only stands up for the rights of white women and does not address the problems of women of colour. “Het bestaan van zwarte vrouwen wordt ontkennd, althans niet gezien en niet gehoord” [The existence of black women is denied, at least not seen and not heard], her statement read. This caused a major stir and, in addition to the official programme, a working group was set up to pay more attention to the issue. Various initiatives and networks gradually emerged such as *Zwarte Vrouwenkrant* (Black Women’s Newspaper), *Zwarte Vrouwenradio* (Black Women’s Radio), *Sister Outsider*, etc. The term ‘black’ stands for all black, migrant and refugee women. They are being discriminated in society on multiple axes. Due to their skin colour, they experience racism and at the same time feel excluded from the feminist circles because their needs and problems are diametrically different from those of white women. In 1985, the first black and migrant women’s knowledge, library and documentation centre *Flamboyant* was established (Servage, 2021). Numerous lectures, study days, courses and meetings were organised at this centre.

Around this time, the concept of *intersectionality*<sup>6</sup> was introduced into Dutch society. Philomena Essed, in her book *Alledaags racisme* (Everyday Racism, 1984), outlined the obstacles and prejudices that Surinamese and Afro-American women face in everyday life. Gloria Wekker introduced the concept of ‘kruispuntdenken’ as the Dutch variant of intersectionality in 2001. Her publication *De witte onschuld* (The White Innocence), in which she examined white privilege,<sup>7</sup> was also published in 2017 (Happel, 2021).

## A new view on history

The rising number of migrants also gradually increased protests against Zwarte Piet (Black Pete).<sup>8</sup> In 1989, Rahina Hassankchan wrote the book *Al is hij zo zwart als roet* (Though He’s as Black as Soot) about the history of Saint Nicholas celebrations, and in 1994 the action committee

<sup>6</sup> American professor Kimberlé Crenshaw wrote an essay in 1989 where she introduces the term *intersectional feminism*. Intersectionality means that each person’s position in society is determined by a number of aspects, such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and age. The basis of this thinking can be traced back to the enslaved woman Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) and her statement “Ain’t I a Woman?” She was the first to point out that women of colour are treated differently (Happel, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> The term refers to the social advantages white people have in society over people of colour. White skin colour is thereby seen as the norm, while people of colour often face discrimination. A fierce debate has surrounded the term since its inception. Among other things, the term has also been criticised from progressive quarters for placing too much emphasis on identity politics, causing e.g. class struggle to be lost sight of (Andino Midence, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Black Pete is St Nicholas’ helper, he originally had a dark skin colour and curly hair, was silly and a bit loud. The Black Pete debate points out that this figure is stereotypical and racist. A new Pete has consequently been



Zwarte Piet is Zwart Verdriet (Black Pete is Black Sorrow) was founded. In 1998, Lulu Helder and Scotty Gravenberch published the anthology *Sinterklaasje, kom maar binnen zonder knecht* (Saint Nicholas, Come In Without a Servant) in which writers and scholars spoke out about the tradition. For the general public, however, the protests against Black Pete were linked to the artist Quinsy Gario and the poet and activist Jerry Afriyie, who were arrested at the nationwide entry of Sinterklaas in 2011 for wearing T-shirts and placards reading *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* (Black Pete is Racism) (Soudagar, 2021). The space for black people gradually also began to grow because of the Black Lives Matter movement, which spread around the world. After George Floyd's death in 2020, mass protests were held everywhere.

The social debate on racism and slavery spurred a fresh look at history and attempts were made to draw more attention to the darker sides of history. In 2019, the Amsterdam Museum decided to start using the neutral term 'the seventeenth century' instead of 'the Golden Age'<sup>9</sup> (Maerevoet, 2019). By doing so, the museum wanted to motivate visitors to look at historical facts from a broader perspective. In May 2021, the Rijksmuseum opened a major exhibition on slavery. Additional text signs were also hung next to the paintings and objects in the permanent exhibition (Fraanje, 2021).

The Golden Age and the ensuing colonial period still evoke mixed feelings among many people. This is also illustrated by the fierce debate surrounding the statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen<sup>10</sup> in Hoorn. Should this statue remain in its place of honour or should it end up in a museum? Jan Pieterszoon Coen was considered a national hero for centuries and not much attention was paid to the fact that he had been responsible for the genocide in Banda, which almost depopulated the islands. Society seems to be divided: one group of people thinks there is no point in discussing the past and that everything should stay as it is, while the other group wants the immediate removal of the statue. Somewhere in the middle one hears voices that want to explain history in a more nuanced way. The colonial period is undoubtedly one of the most important eras in Dutch history. The many discussions on the subject may make some people feel that the fundamental norms and values of Dutch society have been threatened. They also question why white Dutch people have to adapt to someone else in their own country.

## Identity

The Surinamese-Dutch writer Karin Amatmoekrim discusses the idea of loss in her lecture *Wij hebben een wereld verloren* (We Have Lost a World, 2020). She argues that a lost world lies at the core of the identity of all people with a colonial history. In the Netherlands, as in other European countries, identity and society are becoming important political themes, as the traditional view of identity based on the opposition between 'us' and 'the other' can no longer fully apply in a multicultural society, although this shift is perceived by many people as a threat to age-old cultural norms and values.

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introduced in recent years – a swept Pete. He has smudges of soot on his face because he delivers presents through the chimneys.

<sup>9</sup> In the seventeenth century, the Netherlands had a leading position in arts, science and trade, which is why people describe this period as Golden. The other side of the coin, however, is the fact that the wealth came about partly through the exploitation of people in the colonies. There is consequently an ongoing debate about the appropriateness of this term.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Pieterszoon Coen was the governor general of the Dutch East India Company and the founder of the city of Batavia. The monopoly on the nutmeg trade is also among his merits, although it is ambivalent, since nutmeg was the very reason for the genocide in the Banda Islands.



We lijken daarbij doordrongen te zijn van de angst voor verlies: verlies van een cultuur zoals we die kennen, van een geschiedenis zoals die ons altijd verteld is geweest, verlies van een aarde die we voor vanzelfsprekend hebben genomen. En ik vraag me af: kan het westen iets leren van de manier van kijken van postkoloniale schrijvers bij het omgaan met dit idee van verlies?

[In doing so, we seem to be imbued with the fear of loss: loss of a culture as we know it, of a history as we have always been told, loss of an earth we have taken for granted. One wonders whether the West can learn anything from the way of seeing postcolonial writers in dealing with this idea of loss?] (Amatmoekrim, 2020, p. 244)

In a globalised world, not one static identity is central, but rather international relations and interactions matter. According to Amatmoekrim (2015), the Netherlands has no homogenous identity, because today's Dutch are people with different backgrounds and skin colours. The identity lies precisely in the lack of definitions<sup>11</sup> in an ever-changing context. Writers with a migration background can help shape a whole new Western culture.

Through their work, these authors provide new perspectives that can enrich the prevailing narratives. An excellent example of such an author with a fluid idea of identity is precisely Astrid Roemer. According to the Surinamist scholar Michiel van Kempen, her uniqueness lies in the fact that she never allows anyone to label her and that she tries to transcend any limiting framework (Van Kempen, 2003, p. 1101). She views exposing violence in all its forms as her mission in life. As a black author, woman and migrant, she has faced multiple forms of discrimination during her lifetime. She draws attention to inequality between people, not only in her books, but also in articles and interviews.

## The life of Astrid Roemer

Astrid Heligonda Roemer was born on 27 April 1947 in Paramaribo as the eldest daughter in a Creole middle class family. She, her brother and two sisters were raised only by their mother, as the father lived abroad. According to Roemer, the mother is the centre of existence in the Caribbean. "Een gezin zonder moeder is daar een gebroken gezin, en een gezin zonder vader is geen ramp." [A family without a mother is a broken family there, and a family without a father is not a disaster.] (Wytzes, 1988, p.10).

When she was 19, she moved to the Netherlands to complete her education as a teacher. She then returned to Suriname. In the early 1970s, as a young teacher in Paramaribo, she was fired for refusing to celebrate Sinterklaas with Black Pete (Roemer, 2020). She also worked as an editorial board member of the left-wing opinion magazine *Fri Sranan* (Free Surinam), at the Surinamese embassy in The Hague, where, among other things, she was editor-in-chief of the political magazine *Nieuw Suriname* (New Suriname). In the year of Suriname's independence (1975), she settled permanently in The Hague. She also wrote weekly columns for Radio-West which later appeared compiled as *Oost-West Holland Best* (East West Holland Best 1989) (Van Kempen, 2003). She was active in the cultural centre Flamboyant, where she gave workshops for women's creative writing. She wrote numerous reviews of Surinamese literature.

Roemer was also politically active, although that ended up being quite controversial. She was elected as a counterweight to far-right members of the city council. Roemer soon found herself

<sup>11</sup> Homi K. Bhabha also points out that identity is no longer stable and uniform but hybrid, it does not arise in a closed culture but at the border of different cultures. Hybridisation is a constant process of interaction, change and adaptation. (Vitáčeková, 2010).

in conflict with two other group members. She was blamed for being little active and rarely attending meetings. She argued that she did a great deal of work outside the municipal council and eventually decided to continue as an independent councillor (“GroenLinks vraagt”, 1993). According to her, she became disillusioned about politics because council democracy is a game of protocols, rhetoric and rituals, legitimised by freedom of speech and free election (Roemer, 1993).

Between 2000–2015, Roemer withdrew from public life and lived in different countries (e.g. Belgium, Scotland, Suriname). Cindy van Kersenboom made a film about these wandering years *De wereld heeft gezicht verloren* (The World Has Lost Face, 2021).

## Oeuvre

Fighting violence, racism and sexism runs as a common thread through Roemer’s poetry, prose, plays, readings, columns and essays, where she reflects on current events. She published her first collection of poems, *Sasa, mijn actuele zijn* (Sasa, My Present Being, 1970), under the pseudonym Zamani. Her debut novel *Neem mij terug, Suriname* (Take Me Back, Suriname, 1974) became very popular in her native country. Roemer was not satisfied with it, however, so rewrote it and published it in 1983 under the title *Nergens ergens* (Nowhere Anywhere). This was a typical migrant novel – feelings of uprooting in a new country and, at the same time, alienation from the homeland. Her novel *Over de gekte van een vrouw* (On a Woman’s Madness, published in 1982) can be considered one of the first postmodernist novels in Caribbean literature (Kempen, 2016, p. 43). This book is an important, feminist work. The main character Noenka is a black, lesbian woman in search of herself. People around her consider her to be mad, although they turn out to be much madder. She dealt with the blackness issue in her play *De zak van Santa Claus* (The Bag of Santa Claus, 1983).

Her prose work includes several novels and novellas such as *Levenslang gedicht* (Lifelong Poem, 1987), *Het spoor van de jakhals* (The Trace of the Jackal, 1988), *Rosa* (2001), *Olga en haar driekwartsmaten* (Olga and Her Three-quarter Mates, 2017) and *Gebroken wit* (Off-white, 2018). Considered her magnum opus are three novels *Gewaagd leven* (Daring Life), *Lijken op liefde* (Looks Like Love) and *Was getekend* (Signed), which were first published between the years 1996 and 1998, merged then in 2001 as *Roemers drieling* (Roemer’s Triplets) and in 2016 as *Onmogelijk moederland* (Impossible Motherland). These novels are set in the period before and just after Suriname’s independence (1975). Through a masterful depiction of interpersonal relationships, she analyses the impact of colonialism and slavery on the daily lives of Surinamese people. Roemer characterises this trilogy as a search for her identity as a Surinamese-Dutch woman and attempts “het geweld te laten oplichten als iets wat onlosmakelijk verbonden is met hoe de samenleving is ingericht” [to illuminate violence as something inextricably linked to how society is structured] (cover text *Onmogelijk moederland*).

Astrid Roemer’s style is very specific and sometimes comes across as over-complicated. She is in love with the language, playing with it a great deal, creating neologisms and extracting words from Surinamese Dutch. A chronological account is an exception, however, rather than a rule. All this does not make her prose easily digestible, but on the contrary, the reader often has to put in much effort to get into the plot. As a reward for the effort, however one is presented with a magisterially layered story that presents events from different perspectives.

## Literary awards

In the year 2016, her prose work was finally awarded the prestigious P. C. Hooft Prize. This was her first Dutch award, but as early as 1999 she received the LiBeraturPreis for the German translation of her novel *Lijken op liefde* (1997). Last year (2021), she was awarded the Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren, the most important Dutch award for literature. This celebration unfortunately had a bitter aftertaste for her. Her statements on Facebook (where she wrote that Bouterse<sup>12</sup> was unforgettably courageous and that he should be given a statue) unleashed a wave of criticism and conflicting opinions. Roemer was offended and scolded people on Facebook. Some were of the opinion that the award should have been withdrawn. It was finally decided that she will receive the award but without the gala presentation by the Belgian king. The Dutch journalist Maria Vlaar summarised these events in her blog, characterising Astrid Roemer as a rebellious, peculiar and combative writer: “Zij laat zich niet in welk hokje dan ook duwen, zeker niet dat van de dankbare zwarte vrouw die moet zeggen wat haar wordt voorgeschreven.” [She does not allow anyone to place any label on her, certainly not that of the grateful black woman who has to say what is prescribed to her.] (Vlaar, 2021).

## A Feminist, anti-racist, multi-cultural and world-centric outlook on life

Het hele leven [...] is nu eenmaal racistisch en seksistisch. Ook in Nederland. Nederland heeft een racistische geschiedenis. Anders was het natuurlijk niet een van de rijkste landen ter wereld. Het is geen toeval dat in de meeste arme landen gepigmenteerde mensen wonen en dat de machtscentra van de wereld worden bevolkt door witte mannen. Ik ben overgevoelig voor die ongelijkheid in het leven en ik schrijf om duidelijk te maken dat ik die vreselijk racistische wereld niet accepteer.

[All of life is now racist and sexist and this is the case in the Netherlands as well. The Netherlands has a racist history. Otherwise, of course, it would not be one of the richest countries in the world. It is no coincidence that most poor countries have pigmented people living in them and that the world's power centres are populated by white men. I am hypersensitive to this inequality in life and I write to make clear that I do not accept this terribly racist world] (Kantelberg 1993, p. 44)

This quote shows Roemer's vision in a nutshell. She seeks to expose inequality and violence in society. The social abuses in Suriname, but also racism and discrimination in the Netherlands, provide the material for her poems and stories. All kinds of discrimination (by race, gender or sexual orientation) run as a thread throughout her poetic and prosaic oeuvre.

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<sup>12</sup> In 1980, a group of Surinamese soldiers led by Desi Bouterse staged a coup in Suriname. In December 1982, 15 opponents of this military regime were tortured and killed in Fort Zeelandia. These so-called ‘December murders’ are a blot in the history of the young state of Suriname. A trial took place from 2007 and as a result, the main suspect Desi Bouterse (President of Suriname from 2010 to 2020) received a 20-year prison sentence in 2019. According to the *Volkskrant* columnist Sheila Sitalsing, it is unique that “een zittend staatshoofd in z'n eigen land door zijn eigen rechtsstaat veroordeeld wordt” [a sitting head of state is convicted in his own country by his own rule of law] (Unen, 2020). He has not, however, served the sentence yet.

## Anti-racism

Roemer is also very much concerned with how racism is present in our language. According to her, language has several functions. It can be a weapon with which to fight a battle and a means of healing. Language can also express feelings of love or hate. Our use of language is also racially tinged, although it may not seem so at first glance. In her article *De witte man als creditcard* (The White Man as Credit Card), she places in contrast the words 'blank' (blank) and 'neger' (negro), 'negeren' (ignore) from the *Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal* (Great Dictionary of the Dutch language) at the beginning of her article. While 'blank' stands for "spiegelend, blinkend, zuiver, rein" [mirroring, shining, pure and clean], 'neger' is "persoon behorend tot één der zwarte rassen" [a person belonging to one of the black races] and the word 'negeren' means "doen alsof iemand of iets niet bestaat" [pretending that someone or something does not exist] (Roemer, 1990, p. 11). Roemer seeks to recalibrate the words and wishes to rid the words of their racist connotations.

The fight against racism, reflected in the relationship between white and black, is central. Roemer uses both as political terms. When she wants to describe someone of colour, she uses the word pigmented. White is in her words, her attempt to free white people from 'whiteness'. "Blankheid roept bij mij alleen maar negatieve associaties op, precies als het woord 'neger'. Zwart is mijn poging om de als slaaf weggevoerde Afrikaan van zijn 'negerschap' te bevrijden." [Whiteness only evokes negative associations with me, exactly like the word 'nigger'. Black is my attempt to free the enslaved African from his 'niggerhood'.] (Phaf, 1984, p. 222). She does not want blacks to situate themselves in the victim position:

Kijk we moeten de slaventijd vergeten. Niemand is verantwoordelijk voor wat zijn voorouders deden. Maar je moet wel leren van de geschiedenis, je moet niet altijd dezelfde fouten blijven maken. Zwarte moeten hun tas bij de kassa openmaken/ de vernederende grapjes/ Ik weet niet of zwarten witten haten, ik denk van niet. En toch al ga ik 20 jaar om met iemand die wit is, ik blijf denken: wanneer laat je me in de steek?

[Look we have to forget the slave era. Nobody is responsible for what their ancestors did. But you have to learn from history, you shouldn't always keep making the same mistakes. Black should open their bag at the checkout/ the demeaning jokes/ I don't know if blacks hate whites, I don't think so. And yet even though I deal with someone white for 20 years, I keep thinking: when will you let me down?] (Veen, 1984)

Among pigmented people, one also faces internal racism based on skin colour and hair type. It is a survival of colonial states because it still holds true: the whiter the skin, the better the social position. Roemer stated in an interview that many black people suffer from self-hatred because of racism, negrophobia, which also disturbs mutual solidarity (Phaf, 1984, p. 222). Many ethnic groups live in Suriname: descendants of slaves, Maroons, Creoles, a small group of the original population of Indian tribes. After the abolition of slavery in 1863, contract workers from Java, China, Hindustan poured into the country. There are huge cultural differences between these groups and until recently there was hardly any cooperation between them. There are also deep-rooted, internalised stereotypes and prejudices in people against members of the other ethnic groups. Roemer herself is no exception there. After the 2020 Surinamese elections, she wrote on her Facebook that she feels a deep fear of the administrative dominance of Hindus and Muslims<sup>13</sup> (Broere, 2021). Only a year later, there was a meeting between the present Surinamese President

<sup>13</sup> The current Hindu president Santokhi's VHP (Vooruitstrevende Hervormingspartij, Progressive Reform Party) defeated Desi Bouterse's NDP (Nationale Democratische Partij, National Democratic Party) in the elections.

Santokhi in which he handed her congratulations and a gift (Vlaar, 2021). It is not always uncomplicated to live without prejudice. In her works, however, Roemer frequently sketches out interracial, interethnic love relationships (e.g. in *Onmogelijk moederland*), thus creating a positive example.

## Black feminism

Roemer's second novel *Over de gekte van een vrouw* (On a Woman's Madness, 1982) was highly praised by Dutch feminists. The novel about the experience of a black woman breaks the long silence – for the first time in Dutch literary tradition, a black woman is the main character and thus finally becomes empowered. In the same year, Roemer also wrote the musical theatre piece *Paramaribo! Paramaribo!* And it was the first time that racism towards black women was made explicitly visible in theatre (Roemer, 1989, p. 72).

At the International Women's Festival (1982), Roemer read her *Chocoladenmanifest* (Chocolate Manifesto). Here, she points out that the main goal of the Dutch feminist movement is to abolish inequality between white women and white men. Black women look at this struggle with admiration and solidarity, but then realize that it will not yield results for them. They would have no access to 'white capital' because:

Wij Zwarte Vrouwen die in de zogenaamde Hoogontwikkelde landen wonen en werken maar onze ziel in de zogenaamde Onderontwikkelde Landen geworteld weten, worden dagelijks geconfronteerd met fenomenen van het mensonterende verschijnsel dat men Racisme pleegt te noemen.

[We Black women who live and work in the so-called Highly Developed Countries, but know our souls to be rooted in the so-called Underdeveloped Countries are confronted daily with phenomena of the degrading phenomenon called Racism.] (Roemer, 1982, p. 12)

This manifesto appeared in the periodical ADEK along with an appeal for readers to submit ideas and suggestions on black feminism. Roemer was aware that her manifesto was confrontational. Among white women, it might provoke uncomfortable feelings and black women might feel as if their vulnerability had been exposed. We should not forget that the *Chocolate Manifesto* appeared a year before Da Lima's statement at Winter University. Therefore, we can view Roemer as the forerunner of the black feminist movement.

The greatest obstacles to black women's emancipation, according to Roemer, are black men: "Zwarte mannen worden door witten met de nek aangekeken dus doen zij hetzelfde met hun vrouwen. Want ze moeten toch ergens hun gevoel van waardigheid vandaan halen?" [Black men are looked down upon by whites so they do the same to their women. They obtain their sense of dignity from this.] (Durlacher, 1989, p. 11). In her novels (e.g. *Gewaagd leven*), Roemer penetrates the depths of these dysfunctional relationships. Here, the black man's violent relationship with his family is paralleled by the relationship between the coloniser and the former colony.

It is Roemer's writer's goal to denounce gender inequality: "Wat ik ook schrijf wordt altijd geschreven vanuit een soort woede en verontwaardiging dat de maatschappij zo is ingericht dat man en vrouw in een totaal ongelijkwaardige verhouding tot elkaar staan." [Whatever I write is always written from a kind of anger and indignation that society is arranged in such a way that man and woman are in a totally unequal relationship to each other.] (Dirkx van de Sande, 1990, p. 5).

The white feminist struggle in the second wave was about the access to the capital that was in the hands of men. When a woman finally succeeded, she often felt rivalry towards other women.

The labour market, according to Roemer, mirrors power thinking and this rivalry. The same socio-economic context also sets the tone in the relationship between white and black women in the private sphere. The white man has been used as a credit card by some women to shop in the power centres. The dream of many black women is to have a white man who can make life easier for them in Europe. Roemer argues that black women should take responsibility into their own hands in their struggle for emancipation. Their goal should not just be the pursuit of access to centres of power and capital, but they should also make conscious choices so that their decisions do not lead to exploitation of others. “Dat betekent dat zwarte en migrantenvrouwen hun schijnzekerheden (wonen en werken in een rijk land) los moeten laten om naar de waarheid van hun persoonlijk bestaan te kijken.” [This means that black and migrant women must let go of their false securities (living and working in a rich country) to look at the truth of their personal existence.] (Roemer, 1990, p. 16).

## Lesbian

On 21 June 1986, a forum discussion was held between Caribbean-American poet Audre Lorde and Astrid Roemer on lesbian identity. Opinions differed widely. Audre Lorde felt it was essential for black lesbian women to come out and also publicly declare themselves lesbian. According to her, this way they help break through the vulnerability of the status. By self-naming, women reclaim their words and add a positive connotation to lesbianism. In contrast, Roemer found that by explicit naming you run the risk of being trapped by the words and therefore constrained. As an example, Roemer mentions *Twee vrouwen* (Two Women, 1975) by the known Dutch writer Harry Mulisch. Since he was a man, no one labelled him as a lesbian author, but if that book had been written by a woman, that would have happened immediately (Soest, 1986).

This discussion illustrates that Astrid Roemer fights against any circumstances involving labelling: the label ‘black’, the label ‘lesbian’ (Veen, 1984). In Suriname, the dichotomy homosexual – heterosexual does not exist. A new being emerges from a man and a woman and therefore its soul consists of two elements: male and female. These elements must always remain in motion and therefore there would be no need to label oneself as homosexual or heterosexual (Hekma, 2010, p. 249).

Roemer expresses her opinions honestly and openly, undergoing the risk of becoming less popular as a result. This is why she was all the more hurt by the conflict she had with Julien With. In 1987, she filed summary proceedings against him for defamation. Indeed, Julien With claimed in his book *Zwart racisme bestaat niet* (Black Racism Does Not Exist, 1986) that Roemer was opportunistic and that she entered into a lesbian relationship to increase the sales volume of her books. Roemer won the lawsuit and all copies of With’s book had to be withdrawn from sale (Durlacher, 1989, p. 11).

## Female writing

In 1985, Dutch poet Elly de Ward organised a poetess festival on the theme of female writing. In response, Roemer wrote an article of the same name. According to Roemer, female writing is a matter of life and death. The female-male dichotomy requires a vital approach without limiting itself to the biological. Roemer sees female as the organising principle that synthesises, integrates and shapes. In contrast, masculine is the analysing principle that disintegrates. Only together can they form order. Roemer is convinced that literary studies has been too much dominated by the masculine principle, which is why she advocates the release of the form. The associative,



cyclic and concentric could become an enrichment of linear and chronological forms. Moreover, female writing could free the language from white patriarchal abuse (Roemer, 1985, p. 14).

## Conclusion

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that Astrid Roemer played an important role in the Dutch anti-racist and feminist struggle of the 1980s. With her outspoken opinions, she helped to shape the changing society. At the same time, she remained under all circumstances herself and never acted as a representative of any movement. In *Het Grote Schrijversinterview* (The Great Writers Interview, 2020) she explained why she refused to sign the Open Letter of the Black Lives Matter movement. She saw many similarities between the BLM movement now and the feminist movement of the 1980s. Both are characterised by a radical, polarised way of thinking. According to her, this is typical of young anti-movements and will pass again (De Balie, 2020). She does not think in dichotomies, but digs deep beneath the surface to reveal hidden connections that can help the reader look at the events from a broader perspective. In her oeuvre, Roemer examines the relationship between the Netherlands and Suriname and does not pit the ascending coloniser and the colonised against each other as enemies, but analyses all facets of this love-hate relationship. Despite the difficult themes, her works are full of beauty and empathy. In her own words: “Mijn werk is helend dat wil zeggen liefdevol en troostrijk. Als je van een boodschap wilt spreken is die dat het leven altijd de moeite waard is.” [My work is healing, which means loving and comforting. If you want to speak of a message, it is that life is always worth living] (“Erasmus Universiteit,” 1987).

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# The Authors

**MA Matylda Andala** (\*1988) studied Culture Studies at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and Dutch Philology at the KU Lublin in Poland. She is a PhD student at the Department of Dutch Studies at the Palacký University Olomouc in Czech Republic. Her main field of interest is the modern socio-cultural and political landscape of the Netherlands including the position of different minorities and their relation to the Dutch cultural and national identity. She works as a policy officer at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Warsaw, Poland.

Faculty of Arts, Department of Dutch Studies

Palacký University Olomouc, Křížkovského 14, 779 00 Olomouc, Czech Republic

e-mail: matylda.andala01@upol.cz

ORCID: 0000-0002-2077-3428

**Assoc. Prof. Iva Holmerová, MD, Ph.D.**, Head of Centre of Expertise in Longevity and Long-Term Care (CELLO), Faculty of Humanities, Charles University. Lead of the PhD programme Longevity studies. Founding director and consultant geriatrician at the Centre of Gerontology Praha, founder of the Czech Alzheimer Society, member of the Government Committee on Ageing. Past president of the Czech Society of Gerontology and Geriatrics and 2016-2022 chairperson of Alzheimer Europe.

ORCID: 0000-0003-2375-4174

**Mgr. Martin Látal** (\*1996) studied cultural anthropology, history, and media studies and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in cultural anthropology at Palacký University in Olomouc. His current research topic is embodiment in virtual reality. His main fields of interest include game studies, queer studies, anthropology of the body, and digital anthropology.

Katedra sociologie, andragogiky a kulturní antropologie FF UPOL,

Třída Svobody 26, 779 00 Olomouc, Czech Republic

e-mail: martin.latal02@upol.cz

ORCID: 0000-0002-8007-9825

**Eng. Deniz Özdemir, MSc., OSCP** (\*1986). Deniz Özdemir is an OSCP (Offensive Security Certified Professional) and GPEN (GIAC Penetration Tester) certified ethical hacker (white hat) with an industry experience. She obtained her MSc and BSc degrees at Linnaeus University, Sweden in Computer science – specialized in network security. She is currently working as a researcher at Czech Technical University in CIIRC (Czech Institute of Informatics, Robotics and Cybernetics) and studying PhD at Charles University in Prague (Longevity studies, Faculty of Humanities), exploring the multidisciplinary nature of information technologies, fine arts and health. Furthermore, she is a web application security guest lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien, Austria. She was selected by Google as Women Researchers

Grant in Security Award in HackIntheBox Conference, Netherlands in 2015. She is also actively participating in notable international conferences as a speaker, including CERN in Geneva.

Jugoslávských partyzánů 1580/3, 166 36

Prague 6, Czech Republic

e-mail: ozdemird@student.cuni.cz & deniz.ozdemir@cvut.cz

ORCID: 0000-0001-7526-4965

**Mgr. et Mgr. Lucia Poláchová** (\*1987) studied German and Dutch Philology at Palacký University Olomouc. She is currently working on her PhD thesis where she is analyzing the trilogy *Onmogelijk moederland* (2016) written by Dutch-Surinamese author Astrid Roemer. In her research she mainly focuses on the impact of the colonial trauma, the role of the violence in the liberation proces and the relationship between a man and a woman.

Katedra nederlandistiky FF UP

Křížkovského 14, 779 00 Olomouc, Czech Republic

e-mail: lucia.polachova01@upol.cz

ORCID: 0000-0003-1224-3897

**Prof. Dr. Olga Štěpánková** graduated in theoretical cybernetics from the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics of Charles University. In 1998, she was awarded the title of full professor of technical cybernetics at the Czech Technical University in Prague (CVUT). Her research is focused on data mining, artificial intelligence and their utilization for interpretation of biomedical data and for development of assistive technologies. Since 2016, she is the head of the department Biomedical Engineering and Assistive Technology (BEAT) of CIIRC ([www.ciirc.cvut.cz](http://www.ciirc.cvut.cz)).

ORCID: 0000-0002-4384-1868

**Mgr. Veronika Veselková** (\*1998) is a Ph.D. candidate at Palacký University in Olomouc. She studied cultural anthropology, cultural studies, and theatre studies. Her main research interests include intercultural theatre, cultural performativity, and the interlinking of research and theatre. Her dissertation topic deals with performativity of South Korean cultural identity in theatre performances in Central Europe.

Katedra divadelních a filmových studií FF UPOL,

Univerzitní 3, 779 00 Olomouc, Czech Republic

e-mail: veronika.veselkova01@upol.cz

ORCID: 0000-0003-3575-3654

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