

Engaging Public Issues (EPI) Statement against Anti-Black Racism and White Supremacy

Willem Schinkel, Jess Bier, Rogier van Reekum

The following points represent our ongoing efforts to counter and abolish anti-Black racism and white supremacy within the Engaging Public Issues (EPI) master track in sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. In the track, and the university more broadly, we seek to collectively create a space where BIPOC students can thrive, and where all students can shape their education in ways that work to unlearn and undo anti-Black racism and white supremacy, although that undoing necessarily takes multiple forms.

The institution of the university was and continues to be a structural component of anti-Black racism, white supremacy and coloniality. White supremacy pervades society, and universities have long played a central role in upholding related forms of exclusion and domination. As such white supremacy must be countered everywhere it is found, both within the university and beyond, with the aim of abolishing it everywhere. Doing nothing means upholding the status quo.

Universities are also one of the places from which the very structures of anti-Black racism and white supremacy can be combatted, transformed and abolished, an abolition that requires the fundamental transformation of the university. Abolition continues to be an open horizon, as it is very clear that institutions such as the university do not yet fully know how to transform themselves and ourselves.

Declarative statements do not help to abolish anti-Black racism and white supremacy. The following points are meant to hold us accountable. They signify an ongoing commitment to what must be extensive structural action to transform the university into what we believe it has the potential to one day be: a place to come together in solidarity through difference, to make and inquire together, a place whose contours can only emerge through common struggle and a related redistribution of social and material resources.

The following points aim to contribute to this necessary transformation of the university by way of our work in the EPI master track:

1. **Curriculum:** Public issues always involve white supremacy and racism. As such studying them are a central and essential aspect of our curriculum and readings. We thereby resist the tendency to treat these matters as particular or specific problems. We pledge to continue to incorporate into the core of our curriculum the wealth of scholarship by Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC) authors, as well as relevant research on and for BIPOC perspectives and communities. We will continue to collectively learn from and value perspectives and scholarship by and of BIPOC scholars throughout our curriculum.

2. **Enrollment:** We pledge to work every day to counter explicit and implicit discrimination and white supremacy in assessing potential and current students. Among our applicants we pledge to value heterogeneous forms of knowledges, background, and experiences. We will work with students who have outside care, family, work, and health or disability-related responsibilities, to ensure they are able

to contribute to and benefit from the master's program.

3. **Teaching:** We seek to address the limitations of our own perspectives and potential erasures both as they arise and in order to prevent their negative and differential effects upon students. We aim to learn how to better be open to change as educators and researchers. We are working to be reflexive about our own varying privileges as lecturers on an ongoing basis and continuously questioning our embodied assumption about what is required in order to learn together. We seek to connect students with BIPOC scholars and their work, through our own networks both within the Netherlands and internationally, and through invited lecturers, films, and online events assigned for courses.

4. **Supervision and group discussions:** We work to foster respectful spaces where the perspectives and experiences of BIPOC students and scholarship are valued. We and our tutors will moderate discussions as necessary to ensure respectful and full participation of all involved. We pledge to address power dynamics within group discussions on an ongoing basis, including learning to listen and be open to change both interpersonally and systemically in the ways that group meetings such as tutorials and supervision sessions are run. We will continue discussing and revising the program setup with tutors and students as issues arise and being open to formal and informal feedback in this respect.

5. **Public Events:** We will organize events collaboratively with students, with a focus on working with groups that draw on and contribute to the diverse communities of Rotterdam, with a focus on spaces led and run by BIPOC. This includes inviting BIPOC scholars, artists, and activists, as public lecturers and engaging respectfully with their scholarship and ideas. It involves also collaborating with students to connect with community groups and non-governmental organizations working on relevant public issues, including the many such groups in the city of Rotterdam. We will continue speaking out against racism, fascism, and white supremacy in our lives and communities.

6. **Student support:** We will connect students to relevant offices that are available through the university, including the student counselor, Erasmus School of Colour, and the diversity office. We do this while recognizing that these efforts to create a different university have continued to fall short and actual support for student will have to be different in the future. We will work as much as possible to ensure that students also have positive and enriching experiences within the broader university and city of Rotterdam. Where necessary, we will assist students in addressing any concerns or complaints that might arise from discriminatory treatment, however brief or extensive. We will continue advocating for students in the university and broader community, furthering the contributions of BIPOC and their right to live free from harassment on the part of the immigration office (IND) and police. We will continue to support alumni through our networks, letters of recommendation, and informal advice.

These points focus on BIPOC students and researchers because it is imperative to highlight the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism and (settler) colonialism. But this is an intersectional struggle. As such BIPOC students also face systemic discrimination related to multiple aspects, including gender, sex, religion, language, and/or class. We are committed to the belief that the struggles against anti-Black racism and white supremacy are a crucial part of our common struggle against all forms of injustice.

This statement details what we three are doing to address anti-Black racism and white supremacy in the EPI master track, as only small steps towards addressing our complicity as white scholars and university educators. The responsibility is on us to formulate and carry out these points, but in so doing we give credit to the numerous BIPOC groups whose efforts over many years have made possible the current groundswell around Black Lives Matter. Any shortcomings are our own.

We would welcome any comments from those affected by the issues raised above, as well as from our students and tutors. Any comments will be taken seriously and, only with the explicit permission of the commenter, incorporated with credit into future drafts.