

*History is not static. We
can heal intergenerational
trauma by abandoning
our colonial systems of
superiority and inferiority.*

Speaker

**Linda
Nooitmeer**

Expert in Colonial History



European
Peace
Conference

The origins of oppression and inferiority



European
Peace
Conference

Linda Nooitmeer on economic systems of colonial exploitation

*We are excited to announce **Linda Nooitmeer** as a speaker on the origins of slavery at the European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics in Amsterdam, 2025.*

Linda Nooitmeer

Linda Nooitmeer is an expert on colonial history and, alongside her role as Head of the Social Foundation Department at the Municipality of Utrecht, is dedicated to promoting equal opportunities and raising awareness about the legacy of slavery and its ongoing impact today.

From February 25, 2017, to March 1, 2025, she served as a board member of the National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee), the last seven years as its chair. During her tenure, Linda played a key role in the process that led to the official apology from the Dutch government and King Willem-Alexander for the country's involvement in slavery. She has also been actively involved in the recognition of Ketí Koti as intangible cultural heritage and the establishment of memorial committees and slavery monuments in the Netherlands.

On February 21, 2025, Linda Nooitmeer received the Frans Banning Cocq Medal from Mayor Halsema in recognition of her significant contribution to raising national awareness and acknowledging the legacy of slavery in the Netherlands.

Linda Nooitmeer is also known for her deep understanding of the legacies of colonialism. She is a former chair of NiNsee (National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy). Oscar, the founder of the Peace Conference, with a family history of slave owners, came across Linda's viewpoints through an interview with one of their ambassadors. He was fascinated to learn more about her views on intergenerational trauma and its lasting effects on communities affected by the legacy of slavery.

What made you involved in colonial history?

“My engagement with the history of slavery and colonialism began in my youth. I was raised with a strong sense of self-awareness, particularly by my father, regarding the social and economic position of people with African roots globally, and specifically in Suriname, my country of birth. As a result, our family did not celebrate July 1st, the day marking the abolition of slavery, but instead visited neighbourhoods in Paramaribo where our brothers and sisters still resided in the same conditions as their ancestors, struggling under the weight of a colonial system that had been built upon the belief in the inferiority of people of African descent. I was raised to acknowledge that people with African roots must reflect upon their historical and ongoing disadvantaged position, a situation that began with the institution of slavery worldwide from 1452, and specifically in Suriname from 1650. Upon the abolition of slavery, formerly enslaved individuals were forced to adopt Christianity, wear shoes, and assume a surname. My Surinamese ancestors were given the opportunity to choose a family name. They chose 'Nooitmeer' ('Never again'). However, due to the size of the family, it was divided, and the other branches were given the name 'Nimmermeer' (another Dutch term for 'Never again'). This decision was a symbolic act of resistance, a testament to their refusal to allow the horrors of slavery to be repeated. I carry this legacy with me, not out of pride, but with a deep awareness of the responsibility it imparts. It serves as a constant reminder that, when necessary, I must take matters into my own hands.”

My last name was a symbolic act of resistance by my Surinamese ancestors, a testament to their refusal to allow the horrors of slavery to be repeated.

It sounds like you are born in a history of perpetrators and victims?



“History always has perpetrators and victims. This also applies to the history of transatlantic slavery and the oppression of people with African roots by the State. With regard to ancestors, I believe that not only "victimhood" should prevail. After all, it is an achievement in itself that the enslaved ancestors survived slavery at all: the lifespan of an enslaved person was 20 years, and - as we now know - 600,000 Africans were recruited from the continent of Africa and shipped to the New World. When slavery was abolished, there were still 60,000 in Suriname, the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. That says something about the magnitude, about the cruelties at that time. And yet... here I am. Descendant. Arising from a tradition of strength and perseverance. We cannot change history, but we can change its effects on the present, the time in which we now live. No one alive today is responsible for the atrocities during slavery. But we are bound by the obligation to take responsibility in the present for the effects of this history of slavery in order to prevent that today, precisely now, we can talk about perpetrators and victims.”

Where did the system of colonial slavery find its legitimacy in?

“The Catholic Church provided the moral and theological justification for enslaving people of African descent. According to the Bible, Noah’s son Cham was cursed, and it was believed that all his descendants were doomed to live in servitude. This narrative helped to portray people of African descent as 'heathens,' thus rendering them subject to enslavement. While Christianity advocates for love and compassion towards one’s neighbours, this story was used to dehumanise and reduce Africans to the status of property, to be exploited. In the Netherlands, this became a legally sanctioned economic system. Tragically, we remain complicit in the continuing legacy of this exploitation. We continue to turn a blind eye to the systemic inferiority imposed on people today.”

Noah’s story by the Catholic Church provided the legitimacy for demonising and enslaving those with African roots.

How do we see systems of exploitation still back today?



“Systems of exploitation, though they may have evolved, are still present today, deeply embedded in both global and local structures. For people of African descent, we continue to witness their marginalisation, as they remain disproportionately affected by social and economic inequalities. This is evident in persistent phenomena like colourism and skin bleaching, which reflect the continued privilege of white culture across many societies. Those who deviate from the European white norm often bear the brunt of these systemic disadvantages.”

“The historical roots of these exploitative systems are deeply tied to the legacy of colonialism, which established an economic order that benefited Europe at the expense of millions of enslaved people. These systems were not only socially accepted, but also religiously and legally legitimised. The repercussions of this still echo today, as seen in the case of Haiti, where the newly freed Black community was forced to pay reparations to France for their emancipation in 1804. The bitter fruits of this injustice continue to affect Haiti's development.”

“The exploitation doesn't stop there. In contemporary society, we still see the repercussions of a system that privileges the West while marginalising the rest. People of African descent continue to face this inequality, but so do women and child labourers working in sweatshops. Additionally, we benefit from the exploitation of natural resources from other countries to fuel our technology-driven lives, such as the minerals needed for mobile phones. This cycle of exploitation is perpetuated by multinational corporations and global consumers, who turn a blind eye to the human cost of their products.”

*Today's systems
of exploitation
are deeply tied to
the legacy of
colonialism.*

“Despite this, it is important to acknowledge that people who feel victimised, such as those affected by these exploitative systems, are entitled to their feelings. However, maintaining perspective is essential. While it’s understandable to feel victimised, we must not let these feelings define our existence. The systems of exploitation may have evolved, but they persist in new forms, often invisible or normalised in our daily lives. From the exclusion and misjudgement of individuals based on their appearance to the broader systems of global inequality, we must recognise that the exploitation of certain groups continues in subtle and overt ways.”

“This issue is not only visible in the struggles of people of African descent but is also reflected in global dynamics, such as the exploitation of other marginalised communities. While we can empathise with the suffering of others, like the Ukrainian people, it remains difficult to extend the same level of identification to those of African descent. This reflects the enduring legacy of colonial superiority, a mindset perpetuated by institutions like the Catholic Church, which has yet to be fully dismantled.”

The systems of exploitation may have evolved, but they persist in new forms, often invisible or normalised in our daily lives.

What can we do to do justice towards those still suffering?

“To do justice towards those still suffering, we must first recognise the profound impact of historical wrongs and their ongoing consequences. The apology by Dutch King Willem Alexander on July 1st, 2023, for example, helped to ease some of the pain felt by older generations. It served as an important step in acknowledging the harm caused. I believe that actions like these, especially when followed by systemic change, will have a positive impact on the lives of their non-white descendants.”

“However, mere apologies are not enough. We need to ensure that this acknowledgment is followed by concrete steps toward healing. Recognition, healing, and the elimination of socio-economic and cultural disadvantages are crucial. We cannot continue to confirm our own inferiority by holding onto intergenerational trauma. It is important that we break the cycle and allow history to move forward. History is not static; it can be reshaped by the actions we take today.”

“Thus, addressing the suffering of marginalised groups requires a multi-faceted approach that combines formal apologies with systemic changes that promote social, economic, and cultural equity. Only then can we hope to make justice a reality for those who continue to suffer from the legacies of past exploitation.”

History is not static; it can be reshaped by the actions we take today. We need to make justice a reality for those who continue to suffer from the legacies of past exploitation.

Want to learn more? Join us in person or online.

European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics

"We are not at war, but not at peace either," said the new NATO Chief, Mark Rutte. "If you want peace, prepare for war." Is Europe at a crossroad towards more polarisation, identity politics, and war? Reflections on our human nature may help us find a sensible way forward.

At this year's peace conference, the first of its kind, an international group of scholars, experts^{inInt} and practitioners, will seek ways to explore how perpetrator-victim dynamics run through our lives, families, business and politics.

With guest lectures, workshops, personal and group reflections, we seek to embody the latest expertise from the research on war and peace.

JOIN THIS UNIQUE EXPERIENCE